

THE CAUSES OF THE GORDON RIOTS OF 1780: A CLOSE READING OF  
CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS AND DICKENS'S *BARNABY RUDGE*

by

Katharine Marie Faron

May, 2010

Chair: Ronald L. Mitchelson, PhD.

Major Department: English

Contemporary accounts of the Gordon Riots of 1780 are studied closely in order to ultimately determine how Dickens's use of these accounts in *Barnaby Rudge* reveals his view of the cause of the riots. Newspapers, political magazines, diaries, and letters are examined to discover the contemporary views of who was responsible for causing the Gordon Riots. The same historical documents are again considered to compare and contrast details of the riots. The accounts are then discussed to compare various popular descriptions of Gordon within the historical documents to determine the opinions of contemporary authors regarding Gordon and the degree of his role in the riots.

The choices Dickens made as a writer of his historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* are then considered. Dickens's inclusions and exclusions of details from the riot proceedings as described in the contemporary documents are first examined. It is considered how Dickens used various contemporary documents to describe the Papists Act of 1778, the gathering of the rioters in St. George's fields, the state and behavior of the crowd of petitioners upon their arrival at the Houses of Parliament, the bad treatment of the members of the Houses of Parliament, descriptions of the discussions in the Parliament, the destruction of various Roman Chapels, the number of rioters captured during the burning of the chapels, the burning of the prison Newgate,

the attack upon a house of a distiller on Holborn Hill, the actions of the militia, the self-destruction of the mob through liquor, and the behavior of the hangman Edward Dennis during his imprisonment and execution. Dickens's inclusion and exclusion of the descriptions of Lord Gordon in the historical documents are then outlined. The aspects of Lord Gordon that are considered are the eccentricity of Gordon's character and Dickens's own portrayal of Gordon as a madman, the issue of whether Gordon was manipulated by foreign enemies, the degree to which Gordon may have contributed to the cause of the riots, and Gordon's charitable actions in prison.

The comparisons carried out between the contemporary documents reveal the manner in which each author portrays their view of what caused the Gordon Riots and whether or not Lord Gordon should be held solely accountable. The subsequent comparisons made between those historical documents and Dickens's use of those sources within his novel *Barnaby Rudge* reveal that Dickens believed that class differences rather than religious intolerance caused the riots. The comparisons also demonstrate that Dickens viewed Gordon as a madman who others manipulated into providing an atmosphere conducive to rioting. Consideration of Dickens's use of the contemporary sources also shows how Dickens crafted fictional additions to those accounts to strengthen his theme of insanity within *Barnaby Rudge*, consequently furthering his argument that social issues rather than religious ones caused the riots. In general, the argument is made that there is a need within academic scholarship for more close comparisons of historical texts when considering how authors used such texts as sources for historical novels.



THE CAUSES OF THE GORDON RIOTS OF  
1780: A CLOSE READING OF  
CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS AND  
DICKENS'S *BARNABY RUDGE*

A Thesis

Presented To

the Faculty of the Department of English  
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of English

by

Katharine Marie Faron

May, 2010

© Copyright 2010

Katharine Marie Faron

THE CAUSES OF THE GORDON RIOTS OF 1780: A CLOSE  
READING OF CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS AND DICKENS'S  
*BARNABY RUDGE*

by

Katharine Marie Faron

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: \_\_\_\_\_

Richard C. Taylor, PhD.

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Gregg Hecimovich, PhD.

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Anne Mallory, PhD.

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF

ENGLISH: \_\_\_\_\_

Ronald L. Mitchelson, PhD.

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE

SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP AND PRESENT INTENT.....	1
CHAPTER 2: GORDON OR FOREIGN ENEMIES AS MASTERMINDS.....	10
CHAPTER 3: THE RIOTERS ATTACK LONDON.....	17
CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCING THE HISTORICAL GORDON.....	39
CHAPTER 5: DICKENS’S INTERPRETATION OF THE MOB .....	47
CHAPTER 6: LORD GORDON: DICKENS’S FOOL AND MADMAN .....	73
CHAPTER 7: POVERTY BREEDS REBELLION .....	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	88

## CHAPTER 1: PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP AND PRESENT INTENT

This study provides a fuller understanding of Dickens's opinion of the cause of the Gordon Riots of 1780 during his formative years as a writer in which he wrote *Barnaby Rudge*. The contemporary historical sources which Dickens used as background information for recreating the Gordon Riots in his novel *Barnaby Rudge* are compared and contrasted. What Dickens chose to include and exclude from those historical sources to convey his opinion of the cause of the riots will be considered. A detailed study of the contemporary texts detailing the Gordon Riots and Dickens's use of these texts in writing his historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* reminds scholars that Dickens cared about history. It also proves Dickens was a historically minded writer. Dickens expresses the view within *Barnaby Rudge* that the failure of the government and upper classes to properly care for the poverty-stricken lower classes of London led to the Gordon Riots. The ignored and discontented lower classes seized the opportunity provided by Lord George Gordon to rebel against Parliament and those more privileged than themselves under the pretence of religious intolerance but with the true underlying grievance of class differences.

There are obvious similarities between *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* since they are both historical novels written by Dickens. However, this study focuses exclusively on *Barnaby Rudge* to allow for sufficient examination of the historical documents pertinent to the Gordon Riots. Also, Dickens was more successful in conveying the spirit of a riot in *Barnaby Rudge* than he was within his work *A Tale of Two Cities*. This view is shared by Angus Wilson in his work *The World of Charles Dickens* (1970). Wilson believes that despite the similar subjects of riots in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens does not succeed in bringing the riotous violence to life in *A Tale of Two Cities* as he had done in *Barnaby Rudge*. He



states that “The scenes” of the rioting within *A Tale of Two Cities* “are greatly inferior to those in *Barnaby Rudge*” (Wilson, 267). Dickens’s failure to do this is due to the larger focus within *A Tale of Two Cities* on the private lives of the characters as well as the more structured nature of the rebellion of the French Revolution in contrast to the fairly impulsive nature of the Gordon Riots in *Barnaby Rudge*. Also, as Wilson relates, Dickens’s failure in *A Tale of Two Cities* and his success in *Barnaby Rudge* is linked to his exclusion in *A Tale of Two Cities* and his inclusion in *Barnaby Rudge* of “the madness” that Wilson believed should “inform” the actions of the rioters (Wilson, 267). Despite the obvious comparison between *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* of riotous activity, there is an important distinction between a brief riot such as the Gordon Riots within *Barnaby Rudge* and the rebellion over a period of years with the goal of revolution during the French Revolution as depicted within *A Tale of Two Cities*. David Craig previously noted this distinction in his article “The Crowd in Dickens” (1983) in which he states that the “subject” of *A Tale of Two Cities* was “not a riot but a revolution” (Craig, 77).

The question of sources used by Dickens is not an entirely new one. Many scholars have commented upon the sources most likely used by Dickens for *Barnaby Rudge* in biographies of Dickens and in numerous other scholarly works. Edgar Johnson in his biography entitled *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (1952) states that with the exception of the fictional additions of the destruction of The Maypole and the setting fire to Mr. Haredale’s house, “Dickens adheres with great fidelity to historical sources” (Johnson, 335). Johnson mentions that Dickens owned many “contemporary pamphlets and accounts from current periodicals like the *Political Magazine*” and “a copy of Robert Watson’s *Life of Lord George Gordon*” which he is proven to have read as it was “annotated in his hand” (Johnson, 335). Johnson also claims that it

is possible that Dickens used “Sir Walter Scott’s description of the storming of the Tolbooth in *The Heart of Midlothian*” when creating his own images of the attack on Newgate during the Gordon Riots in *Barnaby Rudge* (Johnson 335). Catherine Robson in her essay “Historicizing Dickens” (2006) also suggests the possible influence of *The Heart of Midlothian*, stating that *Barnaby Rudge* possesses “clear debts to works like *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) and its depiction of Edinburgh in the grip of the Porteus Riots of 1736” (Robson, 239). Grahame Smith in his book *Charles Dickens: A Literary Life* (1996) declares that “the storming of the Toolbooth in the opening chapters of *The Heart of Midlothian* is the literary inspiration of his [Dickens’s] central scene” (Smith, *Charles Dickens: A Literary Life* 52-53). Johnson thus obviously provides the reader with some examples of contemporary texts which influenced Dickens in his portrayal of the Gordon Riots. However, Johnson does not include examples of Dickens’s use of these sources in his writing. This study will include quotations from contemporary texts and consider how those texts were used by Dickens as an author.

Peter Ackroyd ambiguously mentions Dickens’s historical sources by merely stating in his biography *Dickens* (1990) that Dickens “had read the main historical narratives” (Ackroyd, 325). Ackroyd instead discusses other influences on Dickens. He explains that Dickens took to walking the streets of London “to find images which could move him” and give him a greater sense of the “historical essence of London” (Ackroyd, 328). According to Ackroyd Dickens also made visits to a prison in order to interview inmates and which may have thus influenced his own depiction of Newgate within *Barnaby Rudge*. In addition, Ackroyd does provide the information that Dickens studied *The Annual Register of 1781* as a source on Lord George

Gordon when “undertaking research for *Barnaby Rudge*” (Ackroyd, 859). These observations are useful, yet Ackroyd fails to consider closely the historical accounts of the Gordon Riots.

David Craig mentions in his essay “The Crowd in Dickens” (1983) that Dickens’s “description of the storming of Lord Mansfield’s house in Bloomsbury Square” follows “the historical record,” yet he does not suggest which historical record Dickens may have drawn from (Craig, 77). Gold claims in his work *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist* (1972) that “A glance at some of the scholarly history of the Gordon Riots quickly shows how accurate Dickens was in his uses of history” without providing any examples (Gold, 116). He simply lists that some of the historical records he glanced at were “John P. DeCastro, *The Gordon Riots* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1926)” and “G. F. E. Rudè, “The Gordon Riots,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> series 6(1956): 93-114” (Gold, 129). Gold does provide the useful comment that Dickens used “dialogue from the trials of the rioters” (Gold, 116-117), yet once again Gold does not provide examples of the dialogue that Dickens borrowed from the actual trials of the rioters.

John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson provide within *Dickens at Work* (1957) the most useful of the vague references to Dickens’s use of historical sources when writing *Barnaby Rudge*. The work states that Dickens’s main sources were “the brilliantly written *Narrative* of “William Vincent” (Thomas Holcroft), Robert Watson’s *Life of Lord George Gordon* (1795), and the reports in the newspapers” (Butt, 84). These are all examples of some of the contemporary texts considered in this study. The authors of *Dickens at Work* (1957) suggest Dickens used such contemporary newspapers as the *St. James Chronicle*, the *Herald*, and *Chronicle or Public Advisor*. *Dickens at Work* (1957) provides the most comprehensive discussion of Dickens’s use

of sources to date; however, even within this work the authors do not provide quotations of the contemporary texts. The work also fails to include examples of how Dickens may have changed the historical information when describing the riots in *Barnaby Rudge*. The authors admit that while “Dickens’s use of his historical sources...has never received the detailed consideration it deserves,” they will not be providing this, for they state that it “can only be summarized here” (Butt, 85). Providing such examination of Dickens’s use of historical documents for *Barnaby Rudge* is indeed one of the intentions of this present study.

Previous studies of Dickens’s sources for *Barnaby Rudge* only include brief statements of documents most likely used or owned by Dickens when describing the Gordon Riots in *Barnaby Rudge*. This study will carry out a more in-depth study of contemporary documents and Dickens’s use of them within *Barnaby Rudge*. The study will consider various contemporary texts available to the public during the time in which Dickens wrote *Barnaby Rudge*, such as newspapers, political magazines, diaries, and letters describing the Gordon Riots. This study will differ from other studies of *Barnaby Rudge* in two important ways. It will demonstrate in detail how Dickens used contemporary documents as sources. In addition, it will examine how Dickens’s use of these sources portrays his view of the cause of the Gordon Riots. His opinion of the cause of the riots reflects his early political philosophies on class issues and the government’s failures regarding them.

Scholars have considered what *Barnaby Rudge* may portray about Dickens’s political ideals. When considering the political ideals conveyed through literature many scholars believe that a piece of fiction is unable to escape the contemporary time in which it was written, either through the author’s conscious effort to provide commentary upon that time or simply through

the unavoidable influence of that time on the author. Jane Smiley in her biography *Charles Dickens* (2002) states this when she observes that in the case of a “historical novel, ...when the novel is first published it may seem to be a true and faithful rendering of the life of the time it is looking back to, but almost every historical novel dates very quickly and soon comes to epitomize its own period more than the period in which it is set” (Smiley, 157). Peter Ackroyd also suggests this in his biography *Dickens*. He claims that “although *Barnaby Rudge* is an “historical novel” it is one, which, like all good historical novels, is actually concerned with its own time” (Ackroyd, 325). He provides an important parallel between the events of the Gordon Riots and the Chartist movement during Dickens’s own contemporary time. He observes that “There had even been a Protestant Association formed in 1839 in direct imitation of Lord George Gordon’s own association” (Ackroyd, 326). Angus Wilson, in his work *The World of Charles Dickens* (1970), continues the comparison. He observes that “Lord George Gordon’s bogus and dangerous petition must have spoken to all good, law-abiding readers of *Barnaby Rudge* as another, earlier version of the wicked Charter” which the Chartists supported during the time that Dickens wrote *Barnaby Rudge* (Wilson, 67). Simon Joyce in “Resisting Arrest/Arresting Resistance: Crime Fiction, Cultural Studies, and the 'Turn to History'” (1995) mentions Mitford’s theory that *Barnaby Rudge* was not a political commentary on the Gordon Riots but rather one on the current issue of the “rejection of the People's Charter in 1839” (Joyce, 309). Thomas J. Rice in his article “The Politics of *Barnaby Rudge*” (1983) points out that Dickens observed “early the full appropriateness of the Gordon Riots as a political metaphor for the contemporary situation” of the Chartist movement. Rice claims that Dickens was “among the first to alert the

public to the most unlikely alliance that was developing between the Ultra-Tories and the Ultra-Radicals” (Rice, 57).

As seen, many scholars suggest that Dickens portrayed the Chartist movement in *Barnaby Rudge*. However, most scholars do not believe that Dickens was a Chartist himself. Mark Willis is a representation of the scholars who claim that Dickens was not a Chartist. Mark Willis in “Charles Dickens and Fictions of the Crowd” (2006) argued that *Barnaby Rudge* demonstrated Dickens was fearful of the rebellious nature of groups such as the Chartists rather than being one himself. Willis explains that Dickens had “a preoccupation with what a riotous London crowd may be capable of” and possessed a fear of “social rebellion and class conflict” (Willis, 93). Willis observes that “Insurrection and revolution, suggested by contemporary Chartist activity, were for Dickens seemingly greater evils than the exploitation of the poor” (Willis, 94). Willis most effectively argues against Dickens as a Chartist through the use of Dickens’s own words, relating that “Dickens was to proclaim in *Household Words* in 1850 ‘I am not a Chartist, and I never was’” (Willis, 93).

The majority of previous scholarship agrees that *Barnaby Rudge* comments upon contemporary events during Dickens’s own time more so than on the historical moment of the Gordon Riots. There are only a few scholars, such as David Craig in his article “The Crowd in Dickens” (1983) and Patrick McDonagh in his article “*Barnaby Rudge*, ‘Idiocy’ and Paternalism: Assisting the ‘Poor Idiot’” (2006), who seem to consider alternate possibilities. Craig suggests that Dickens was not striving to parallel the Gordon Riots with contemporary events. He observes that “Dickens looked right past (or to one side of) the hundreds of Radical risings” which were closer to his own time period “and chose episodes more than half a century old for

his exhibition of mob violence” (Craig, 86). These scholars, however, only briefly mention that the novel may not be about contemporary events. They do not specifically claim as they should that Dickens may have desired to give an accurate historical portrayal of the Gordon Riots more so than commentary upon current political events regarding the Chartist movement. They also fail to argue that despite the possible commentary on the Chartist movement is beneficial to consider the accuracy of the historical portrayal of the Gordon Riots in order to better understand Dickens as a writer. Regardless of whether *Barnaby Rudge* was meant to comment upon contemporary events, it is important to consider the extent to which the novel depicts the historical events of the Gordon Riots. In doing so, we can better understand the influence of that event on Dickens’s own time and to gain a fuller picture of Dickens as a writer.

Therefore, since previous scholarship only includes brief suggestions regarding Dickens’s political goals and philosophies as portrayed within *Barnaby Rudge*, this study strives to provide a uniquely detailed consideration of the contemporary historical texts which Dickens used as sources for *Barnaby Rudge*. The study will take into account the varying interpretations of the contemporary publications to come to a deeper understanding of how Dickens’s inclusion and exclusion of various aspects of those sources demonstrates his own political philosophies surrounding the Gordon Riots of *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens scholarship would benefit from such a study that focuses upon the contemporary texts and provides a comparison of them with Dickens’s use of them within *Barnaby Rudge*. The need for such a study is evident given the number of scholars who choose, when analyzing *Barnaby Rudge* and other works by Dickens, to focus upon the lives of the characters Dickens is so apt at creating, rather than upon the historical and social events surrounding those characters. The study will also consider the aspects of

*Barnaby Rudge* which are completely Dickens's own artful creations and which supplement the historical aspects of the novels. Dickens's fictional additions will be carefully studied in order to consider how they assist Dickens in conveying his opinion of the cause of the Gordon Riots.

Uniquely focusing on the contemporary texts themselves provides a more vivid picture of the historical moment of the Gordon Riots than has been previously available to the general public. A more thorough understanding of the time in which Dickens lived is also achieved. It provides a deeper understanding of an important event, and the social issues that may have caused it, which occurred relatively closely to Dickens's own time when the vastness of history is considered. Dickens's choice to change or not change from the contemporary sources he used and what he invented entirely for the purposes of his fiction will additionally be revealed. Through these revelations yet another opportunity for us to gain a deeper understanding of Dickens as a man and as a writer will be achieved. The analysis of the contemporary documents provides a framework of the political views of the authors of those texts regarding the cause of the Gordon Riots. These analyzes will be considered later in conjunction with Dickens's use of the contemporary documents in order to determine Dickens's own view of the cause of the riots.



## CHAPTER 2: GORDON OR FOREIGN ENEMIES AS MASTERMINDS

Contemporary accounts of the Gordon Riots were found within a variety of texts such as newspapers, political magazines, diaries, and letters. The texts typically described the Gordon Riots as anti-Catholic riots carried out in London in June 1780 by members of the Protestant Association and which led to the burning of numerous structures within the city. Lord George Gordon acted as President of the Protestant Association and was considered by some historical documents to be the leader of the rioters. Each historical account varied slightly regarding the contemporary opinions and the details given of the cause of the riot, the actual riot proceedings, and the portrayal of Lord George Gordon. This chapter will focus on the cause of the riot. The three main opinions of the cause of the riot throughout the contemporary texts appear to be that the violence was either the fault of foreign enemies who planned the riot to harm England, the conscious result of Lord Gordon's actions, or the unconscious result of Lord Gordon's actions.

The anonymous author of *Fanaticism and Treason: or, a Dispassionate History of the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Rebellious Insurrections in June 1780. By a Real Friend to Religion and to Britain* (1780) believes that both Lord George Gordon and national enemies of England are responsible for the Gordon Riots. The author believes that foreign enemies are partly to blame, for he encourages his readers to "use every endeavor to bring to justice the agents of France, Spain and America" (*Fanaticism*, 88). He also suggests the possibility that "the enemies of" England may "have lighted" the "first fires of insurrection, at least might have pointed the rage of the mob to light them" (*Fanaticism*, 41). Yet, he does not deny the role of Lord George Gordon, for he argues that "so connected is the destruction of Popish chapels with the ideas of men who say they assemble to oppose Popery" it is likely that the fires "were begun

at least, in more parts of the city than one, by Lord George Gordon's Protestant petitioners" (*Fanaticism*, 41-42).

The accounts of the riots found within the June and July issues in 1780 of *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* find the fault to be with Lord Gordon as well as foreign enemies. However, while the *Fanaticism* account focused slightly more on Gordon's responsibility for the riots, *The Political Magazine* emphasizes the role of foreign enemies to a greater extent. The magazine's account does suggest that Lord Gordon intended to cause violence, through including the claim of "A gentleman of Lord George's acquaintance" that "just before he set out to join his associators in St. George's fields; his lordship was at breakfast" and that "on the table lay his hat with an immense blue cockade in it and near it a drawn sword" (*The Political*, 408). The sword is meant to indicate Gordon's intent to incite rioting. Yet, immediately following this example the magazine heavily emphasizes foreign enemies as a cause of the riot. It makes the significant statement that

"Whatever were his lordship's designs, certain it is that the agents and spies of our foreign enemies, the numerous confederates of the American Congress, and the secret enemies of government and of our happy constitution all rose up as one man and under the colors of his mob committed all that rapine and havoc which threatened to reduce this flourishing metropolis to a heap of ruins and which for several days gave it the true aspect of a city taken by storm." (*The Political*, 408)

Though the magazine characterizes Lord Gordon as a means through which the foreign enemies caused violence, it also places a great deal of responsibility upon those manipulative foreign powers for the violence of the riots.

*The Political Magazine* later demonstrates that it agrees with *Fanaticism* that foreign enemies were responsible for the riots. The account states that “It was political associators of the emissaries of France, Spain and of the rebels in America” who “acting under the name of the Protestant Associators set the cities of London and Westminster in flames” (*The Political*, 437). The magazine also believes that the inevitable mob violence resulting from such a large body of individuals gathering at St. George’s fields was the cause of the riots. It reminds the reader that “The event of convening so large an assembly is at times to be dreaded because it is impossible to govern a popular meeting so congregated or to answer for their conduct or the consequences of it” (*The Political*, 416). The account supports its claim that both foreign enemies and the chaos of so many individuals congregated together were catalysts for the riots through arguing that sincere petitioners would not have acted as the rioters did. The magazine explains that

“assaulting and ill treating the members of both houses of parliament, destroying the houses and effects of innocent and peaceable subjects, breaking open and burning the goals knocking off the irons of abandoned criminals and letting them loose to spread fire and devastation through the capital and the kingdom and more than all that, attempting to storm and to plunder the pay offices and the bank” would never have been the actions “of real patriots and reformers.” (*The Political*, 408)

*The Political Magazine* thus makes it clear that it believes that the riots were not carried out by individuals who had any serious intentions of getting the petition of the Protestant Association passed by Parliament.

The newspaper account of the riot found in the *London Courant* on Tuesday 6 June 1780, like the accounts in *Fanaticism* and *The Political Magazine*, believes that national enemies are to

blame. However, rather than claiming that France, Spain and America are to blame as the *Fanaticism* and *The Political Magazine* do, the *London Courant* instead states that the Scottish should be blamed for the riot. The newspaper claims that the Scottish Protestant Association played a role in the riots by stating in the Tuesday, 6 June 1780 issue that “The riot of last Friday completes the triumph of the Scotch over this degenerate kingdom” (*London Courant*).

The letters that Sir Samuel Romily wrote on 6 June 1780, 9 June 1780, and 13 June 1780 and which are reprinted in *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romily, Written by Himself; with a Selection from His Correspondence; Edited by His Sons* (1840) reveal that Romily believed that the religious fervor that occurs when the excuse of religion is used for violence caused the riots. He comments in his 6 June 1780 letter on “how dangerous an engine religion is, when employed upon the minds of the ignorant” and he claims that it is “so dangerous, indeed, that it is formidable in any hands, however weak and contemptible” (Romily, 114). Within the same letter, Romily reveals the opinion that the mob mentality that occurs when such a large number of individuals are gathered together also caused the riots. He emphatically writes, “What!- Summon 40,000 fanatics to meet together and expect them to be orderly! What is it but to invite hungry wretches to a banquet and at the same time enjoin them not to eat?” (Romily, 120). Romily thus suggests that it was inevitable that violence would occur when so many individuals met in the same place. He places blame in large part upon Lord Gordon and the Protestant Association, not only for the religious zeal which they used for their purposes, but also for this act of gathering so many individuals together. He claims that the Protestant Association must have known the violent outcome such a gathering would have. He states that “the real intentions of these men are evident” in handbills they published which claimed “that a number of Papists

intended to mingle in disguise among the petitioners for the purpose of raising riots and disturbances” (Romily, 120-121). Romily suggests that the authors of publications intended to encourage rioting under the guise of warning against it.

Fifteen years later, Robert Watson, the author of *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795) published his own opinion of the cause of the riots that had occurred in 1780. Watson defends his friend Lord Gordon from what he believes are wrongful accusations that Gordon was the cause of the riot. Watson strives to remove what he refers to as the “veil of prejudice” against Lord Gordon from the account of the riots (Watson, 2). Watson claims that the root cause of the riot was a “crowd of vagabonds” rather than Lord Gordon. He claims these individuals “mingled themselves with the peaceable citizens” and carried out such violent acts as the mistreatment of the members of Parliament (Watson, 21). Watson also strives to deflect responsibility from Gordon for the riots by including the “address” sent by the Protestant Association to Lord Gordon “upon his acquittal” (Watson, 25). Within the address the Protestant Association claims that they “have undoubted proof that the late horrible outrages...were begun by the Papists, to throw an odium on the Protestant Association” (Watson, 27). The members of the association further implicate Catholics in the violence of the riots by claiming that “not one Protestant Petitioner of forty four thousand, was apprehended, tried, convicted, executed, or killed among the rioters; while under every one of these predicaments Papists are to be found (Watson, 27-28). The members of the Protestant Association also manage to blame foreign enemies for the cause of the riots to further dispel guilt from Lord Gordon and the Protestant Association. The members assert that “lurking

incendiaries” sent by “the spies and emissaries of our national enemies” assisted the Papists (Watson, 27).

Thomas Holcroft in *Thomas Holcroft’s A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots* (1780) appears to share Robert Watson’s belief that Lord George Gordon did not cause the riots and that Gordon did not wish for them to occur. However, there is some contention as to whether the section of the narrative that deals with Lord George Gordon is really written by Thomas Holcroft, or whether friends of Lord George Gordon added it later. A footnote within the work presents this suspicion, stating that:

“It is difficult to accept the anecdotes as having been written by Holcroft since the reading of Lord George Gordon’s character appears to be radically different from that in the preceding pages. It is probable that the printer finding the narrative failed to fill up the final gathering of the pamphlet called upon another of his ready pens to write a few paragraphs to fit the space remaining. It may even be conjectured that this author was more sympathetic towards the Protestant Association and its President than was Holcroft.” (Holcroft, 40)

The sympathetic author claims that Lord Gordon “had no idea of producing the dreadful consequences that ensued from assembling the association” and that he thus cannot be fully blamed for the cause of the riots (Holcroft, 41).

This chapter revealed the overall views of the authors of various contemporary texts as to the cause of the riots. It is now useful to focus on the details provided in the texts of specific aspects of the riots while keeping the authors’ views of the cause of the riots in mind. Concentrating on how these texts chose to describe the riots provides a better understanding

Dickens's novel *Barnaby Rudge*, for an important aspect of a historical novel is the manner in which the author chooses to paint the aesthetic picture of the historical event. The method that the author adopts to describe the historical event reveals, either intentionally or unintentionally, the author's own opinion of that particular historical event. The descriptions of the riot proceedings in the next chapter provide an important resource of contemporary descriptions of the riots that Dickens would have had access to and from which he would have borrowed important details in order to portray the Gordon Riots of 1780. Rather than starting to compare and contrast in the next chapter the aspects of the historical texts which Dickens used or did not use, it will be beneficial to first gain an overall picture of what the authors of the contemporary narratives chose to include and exclude to express their own beliefs as to the cause of the riots. From first analyzing the authors of the historical texts, we can then recognize Dickens's own motives for using or omitting various details from particular authors of historical texts. Chapter 5 specifically compares and contrasts what Dickens borrowed from the contemporary texts.

### CHAPTER 3: THE RIOTERS ATTACK LONDON

The main proceedings of the riots that the contemporary texts primarily focused upon should be considered. The descriptions of the actual proceedings of the riot vary slightly in each account. The accounts include similar details; however, each text chooses to emphasize different aspects of the riots and some accounts are much more comprehensive than others.

*Thomas Holcroft's A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots* (1780) provides a meticulous explanation of the Papists Act of 1778 which the rioters petitioned to have repealed. The act had relaxed some of the laws against Catholics within England. Holcroft describes that the act would return certain rights to Catholics, such as the right "to inherit" land rather than being forced to give the land to their Protestant kin (Holcroft, 13-14). Holcroft includes the stipulations of the act. The act only applied to individuals of or over "the age of twenty-one years" or who were "six months" from turning twenty-one years of age as of 1778. The act required participating Catholics to take an oath that renounced certain aspects of Catholicism. The oath denied the Catholic belief "that princes excommunicated by the Pope and council or by any authority of the see of Rome or by any authority whatsoever may be deposed or murdered by their subjects or any person whatsoever." Individuals taking the oath must also renounce the belief that "the Pope of Rome or any other foreign prince prelate state or potentate hath or ought to have any temporal or civil jurisdiction power superiority or preeminence directly or indirectly within this realm" (Holcroft, 14-15).

However, Holcroft published his explanation of the Papists Act of 1778 years after the riots themselves. The *Gazetteer* and *New Daily Advertiser* published its description of the act during the riots, on Saturday 10 June 1780 in Issue 16 015. The *Gazetteer* thus provides the more immediate prospective of a contemporary view of the act and its role in riotous proceedings. The



article, however, concentrates less on the act itself and more so on who helped to pass the act. The newspaper article in the *Gazetteer* simply states that in 1778 “several Roman Catholic noblemen and gentlemen applied to Lord North to get the laws then in force against them repealed” (*Gazetteer*). The article relates that Lord North suggested Sir G. Savile instead and the speed with which Sir Savile agreed to assist the Catholics. The paper reveals the opinion of the editors that the act caused the riots and the anti-Catholicism of the editors, for it states that “it is hoped the effect of the act has convinced Sir G. Savile that popery cannot be tolerated with safety in this country” (*Gazetteer*).

The June 1780 issue of *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* gives a very detailed description of the gathering of the rioters in St. George’s fields and of their procession to the Houses of Parliament on the fateful day of 2 June 1780. The magazine describes Lord George Gordon’s declaration to the members of the Protestant Association who had signed the petition which requested the repeal of the Papists Act of 1778. The declaration included the direction that all petitioners should gather in St. George’s fields at ten o’clock on 2 June 1780.

The description from the magazine suggests a military organization of the petitioners, even during their first gathering. The account states that the petitioners “paraded in different divisions with flags, marshalling themselves in ranks” (*The Political*, 416). The choice of military language reveals the author’s belief that the petitioners met for violent purposes. The account of the riots entitled *Fanaticism and Treason: or, a Dispassionate History of the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Rebellious Insurrections in June 1780. By a Real Friend to Religion and to Britain* (1780) also chooses to describe the division of the petitioners into groups

akin to armies. The account states that “The assembly divided into three troops, or rather armies” (*Fanaticism*, 32).

The magazine estimates the number of people to have gathered to be about 50,000, and it relates that some accounts “even go so far as to say 100,000” (*The Political*, 416). The letters that Sir Samuel Romily wrote on 6 June 1780, 9 June 1780, and 13 June 1780, and which are reprinted in *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romily, Written by Himself; with a Selection from His Correspondence; Edited by His Sons* (1840), give an even better idea than *The Political Magazine* did of the extent to which the agreed upon numbers of petitioners and other individuals gathered differed among various accounts. Romily admits that he had heard accounts as “moderate” as “14,000” people gathered and that the “largest computation” that he had “heard and which” he felt was “certainly very much exaggerated” was as large as “100,000” people (Romily, 115). The 100,000 people referenced by both Romily and *The Political Magazine* is either accurate or simply a popular rumor during the tumultuous times. The later account of the gathering of the petitioners written by Robert Watson in *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795) does not choose to dwell upon the large numbers of individuals gathered or the manner in which they may have resembled an army, though he does use the term “divisions.” Instead, Watson focuses upon the fact that they were “dressed in their best cloths, with blue cockades and colors flying, and the words “NO POPERY” inscribed on their hats” (Watson, 20).

This portrayal of the petitioners as well dressed serves Watson’s purposes of deflecting some of the blame that he felt society placed upon Lord George Gordon for the riotous activity that later occurred after the procession to the Houses of Parliament. It also suggests that the

petitioners themselves were upstanding citizens and that the riotous activity was only carried out by lower classes of people who later joined the multitudes with different motives than the eradication of the rule of popery. Watson makes this claim explicitly when he states that while Lord Gordon addressed the petitioners in the lobby of Parliament “a crowd of vagabonds mingled themselves with the peaceable citizens.” Watson claims that these new additions to the crowd were the individuals whom “treated the members very roughly, and insulted the peers” (Watson, 21).

Contrary to Robert Watson’s claim that the petitioners were “dressed in their best cloths” (Watson, 20), Romily describes these individuals as “in a great measure of the lowest rabble” and as “men who without doubt not only had never heard any of the arguments for or against toleration but who were utterly ignorant of the very purport of the petition” (Romily, 115). *The Political Magazine* portrays petitioners akin to those described by Watson as well as petitioners that fit the description of Romily’s account. There were petitioners who appeared to be “orderly” and non-violent and who marched behind the “bag-pipers” (*The Political*, 416). In contrast there were also those who preceded the peaceful petitioners and who strove “to clear the way” and “had the true aspect of abandoned vagabonds” (*The Political*, 416).

The accounts of the state and behavior of the crowd of petitioners upon their arrival at the Houses of Parliament are all fairly similar. The account within the June and July issues in 1780 of *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* relates how the petitioners “seized and occupied,” very much like an army, “all the avenues from the outer door up to the very door of the House of Commons which they attempted twice to storm” (*The Political*, 416). The account in *Fanaticism and Treason: or, a Dispassionate History of the Rise,*

*Progress, and Suppression of the Rebellious Insurrections in June 1780. By a Real Friend to Religion and to Britain* (1780), describes a similar scene of where the petitioners assembled. The account states that by “two and three o’clock” the petitioners “were all assembled in the streets and open places near the Houses of Parliament” (*Fanaticism*, 32). The account recounts how the rioters made the proceedings difficult by the distractions of “the tumults at their doors by which many members were prevented from entering the house.” It also explains that the disruptions in the streets resulted in the inability to have a “fair and equal representation of the people” present within Parliament that day to vote upon motions (*Fanaticism*, 32-33).

The anonymous author of the accounts also points out that even “The lobby of the House was full of rioters.” He then portrays the rioters attacking London by stating that the rioters had “literally besieged” Parliament (*Fanaticism*, 38). The author states that “Either from design or from the crowd, the door” of Parliament “was more than once almost forced open” (*Fanaticism*, 38). He allows for the possibility of premeditated violent intentions by suggesting it was rioters’ “design” to force the door open (*Fanaticism*, 38). Robert Watson in his account of the riot proceedings in his work *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795) does not emphasize that the petitioners were filling the avenues around parliament or that they were within the lobby of the Houses of Parliament. He desires to reduce the blame of the leader of these petitioners, Lord Gordon. Watson thus presents the impression that the petitioners behaved in an orderly fashion. He briefly mentions that the petitioners were in the lobby by relating that “Lord George went to the gallery that looks into the lobby and addressed them” (Watson, 21). Watson includes this to suggest that Lord Gordon’s speech to the petitioners did not cause the rioting. He instead claims that while Lord George was addressing

the petitioners, “In the mean time, a crowd of vagabonds mingled themselves with the peaceable citizens, treated the members very roughly, and insulted the peers” (Watson, 21).

Contemporary accounts describe the bad treatment of the members of the Houses of Parliament by the petitioners as they tried to enter parliament. Each of the accounts seem to agree such mistreatment occurred, though Robert Watson argued that the individuals mistreating the members were “vagabonds” who placed themselves amongst the petitioners rather than the petitioners themselves (Watson, 21). *Fanaticism and Treason: or, a Dispassionate History of the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Rebellious Insurrections in June 1780. By a Real Friend to Religion and to Britain* (1780) is occasionally vague about the treatment of the members of Parliament. The account claims that “The principal performances of the insurgents shall be faithfully recorded” (*Fanaticism*, 37). Yet, the anonymous author then explains he will not include “the name of every individual whom they stopped, the instant at which they turned into every particular street, and where they halted to shout ‘No Popery! Down with the ministry!’” (*Fanaticism*, 37). He claims that no reader would want to read such information. The account also claims that no reader would want to know the “exact damage that was done to every member’s coat, the quantity of powder that was beaten out of every head, the number of blows and bruises that every noble Lord received” (*Fanaticism*, 37). Yet, despite the lack of details regarding rioters mistreating specific individuals, we are at least able to glean from the account that the rioters assaulted and bruised members of parliament and beat their wigs.

The violence towards the wigs of the parliament members is an aspect of the riot which is similarly related within various contemporary accounts. Robert Watson’s account, like *Fanaticism*, mentions that “The bishops had their hats and wigs pulled off” (Watson, 21).

Despite the claim by the author of the *Fanaticism* account that the reader might not wish to read about each particular victim, the account did have moments of specificity. It mentions the certain members of Parliament that the petitioners mistreated. The account includes a list of the individuals that the rioters attacked. It mentions that “The Archbishop of York was the first on whom they began to wreak their vengeance” and it reveals that York “was vilely insulted” (*Fanaticism*, 37). The account then proceeds to list other individuals who “were treated with more or less unmanly brutality” including “The Lord President (Bathurst), the Lords Mansfield, Stormont, Hillsborough...the Lords Willoughby de Broke, Boston, Ashburnham, St. John, Dudley” (*Fanaticism*, 37). The account also indicates that the mob attacked Lord Boston. It states that “Lord Boston entered the house in a condition more like one of the rioters than a peer of parliament” (*Fanaticism*, 34).

The contemporary account in *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* (1780) describes that the petitioners forced members of Parliament to promise to support their petition. The magazine also details how the petitioners forced “almost everyone...to put blue cockades in their hats and cry out ‘No Popery No Popery!’” (*The Political*, 416). In general, the account describes that the petitioners strove to “exercise the most arbitrary and dictatorial power over both lords and commons” (*The Political*, 416). The account goes into specifics as to which members of Parliament the petitioners mistreated and what was done to them. The rioters robbed the members or the rioters damaged the carriages of the members and tore the clothes off the members. Some of the members attacked were the “Archbishop of York”, “President of council”, “Lord Mansfield”, “Lord Stormont”, “Duke of Northumberland”, “Bishop of Litchfield”, “Bishop of Lincoln”, “Earl of

Hillsborough”, “Lord Townshend”, “Lords Willoughby, de Brook, Boston and Ashburnham”, “Lord Sir John” and “Lord Duley” (*The Political*, 416-17).

It is interesting to compare the descriptions of the treatment of the Parliament members in the accounts written in 1780 with the later account by Robert Watson. The accounts of 1780 tended to blame Gordon for the behavior of the petitioners against Parliament, while Watson possessed sympathy towards Gordon due to their friendship. Watson describes the attacks upon the members in a similar way to the accounts written in 1780 and he includes similar details, such as damage to their clothes. Watson states that “The bishops had their hats and wigs pulled off, and several, after being dragged from their carriages, with difficulty saved their lives” (Watson, 21). Watson stays sympathetic to Gordon, however, by claiming that “a crowd of vagabonds mingled themselves with the peaceable citizens” and “treated the members very roughly, and insulted the peers” (Watson, 21).

The account includes descriptions of the discussions in the Parliament regarding the government’s failure to prevent the current riotous activity. It relates how Lord Shelburne questioned “what steps government had taken to guard against what they must, from the advertisement, have foreseen” (*Fanaticism*, 34). The extent of the inaction of the government is made clear through the revelation that the government had known about the large gathering and did nothing to prevent rioting. This is evident through the account that “Lord Hillsborough informed the House (in the midst of much altercation) that ministry had met upon the subject of Lord George’s alarming advertisement; and that the magistrates of Westminster had been warned of the expected mob” (*Fanaticism*, 34). The account conveys the chaotic atmosphere within the

house through the mention that Lord Hillsborough was speaking during “much altercation” (*Fanaticism*, 34).

Romily describes that the result of the vote of whether to consider the petition that day or “the following Tuesday” was “a majority of 190 against 9” in favor of considering the petition the next Tuesday (Romily, 118). He also recounts how “The clamors of the people” became “so loud” that eventually “there appeared among them symptoms of such a dangerous temper that it was absolutely necessary to call up the guards” (Romily, 118). According to Romily it was possible to clear “the lobby and the avenues of the House” of the petitioners, but he asserts that it was impossible to control “the fury of the populace” that resided outside of the doors of Parliament (Romily, 118).

The petitioners eventually dispersed from the Houses of Parliament. However, some petitioners later re-gathered and destroyed various Roman Chapels. The contemporary accounts are essentially in agreement regarding these events. Yet again, however, *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* (1780) offers the most detailed information regarding the behavior of the rioters and the destruction enacted by them. The magazine includes the time at which the mob began its journey to the chapels, unlike any of the other accounts. It states that at “About ten o’clock the mob paraded in different divisions from Palace yard.” A detailed account of the destruction at “the Sardinian ambassador’s chapel in Duke Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields” is given, stating that the rioters “broke open the doors of the chapel and pulled down the rails, feats, pews, communion table &c” and that they “brought them into the street, laid them against the doors and set them on fire.” The account explains that in “about twenty minutes the chapel caught fire.” At the Sardinian chapel, “The mob” managed to



keep people from putting out the flames until “about eleven” when “the guards came” and “the engines at this time began to play.” Despite the arrival of the guards which allowed the fire engines to strive to save the chapel, “At twelve o’clock the inside of the chapel was entirely consumed and the house over the gateway much damaged.” The account then goes on to mention something entirely unique from the other accounts, that the militia captured some ringleaders of the mob during the attacks on the chapels. The claim that there were ringleaders suggests that the rioters planned the attacks on the chapels. The magazine reports that “the guards took several of the ringleaders” but that “by the assistance of the mob some made their escape” (*The Political*, 421).

*The Political Magazine* provides a detailed account of the attack on the Bavarian ambassador’s chapel as well. *The Political Magazine* explains that “Another party” of the mob was responsible for “partly” destroying “the chapel of the Bavarian Ambassador in Warwick Street, Golden Square.” The magazine describes the looting by the rioters. The account mentions that “The plate belonging to the chapel” was not stolen because it “was secured before the rioters could get admittance.” However, the rioters did steal “the poor’s money” from the poor box, “as well as many other things of value.” The description of the individuals arrested at this particular chapel serves to depict both the number of rioters captured as well as some of the damage done. It describes how “The soldiers intercepted” some of the rioters “in the midst of their demolishing the rails of the altar and the furniture over it.” The detail that “the frame” of the altar “was unhurt” is once again an example of the extent to which *The Political Magazine* account pays attention to every minute detail. The account reports that “Thirteen of the rioters were taken into custody” and includes the information that “several” of the rioters “were wounded by the

soldiers' bayonets." A related description of the destruction carried out by the rioters and of their arrest is that "They broke also into the houses of the Bavarian and Sardinian Ambassadors" and that "three of the rioters were taken in the latter" house. Also important to note is that this particular account included the unique information that "The chapels of the Portuguese, Neapolitan and Venetian Ministers" all "escaped the fury of the mob." It is further worth mentioning that the account felt it of import to point out that these chapels were "all of the Romish religion" and yet they were spared. The account includes these details about the chapels that were spared to suggest that the riot was not entirely about attacking Catholics, but rather had other causes and goals (*The Political*, 421).

As the account in *The Political Magazine* mentions the military captured thirteen rioters during the burning of the chapels, and the soldiers injured some of the rioters. The account then later describes the identities and examinations of these rioters. There were those rioters such as "Michael Bryant, apprentice to Mr. Sinclair, painter and glazer in Hard Street" (*The Political*, 421) against whom there was no actual evidence of being a rioter beyond that he had been "found near the chapel" (*The Political*, 422). However, the evidence against others was slightly more poignant, such as against "Isaac Hemmaway, a tailor" who "was seized by a sergeant and corporal of the guards for being in the chapel whilst it was on fire" (*The Political*, 422).

The rioters did not end their destruction with the burning of the chapels described in the contemporary accounts of the riots. One of the major destructive acts of the rioters and one of the most focused upon instances of the riots within contemporary texts is the burning of Newgate. Romily, in his 9 June 1780 letter, describes the events of the evening of 6 June 1780 the Tuesday on which Parliament had decided to consider the petition of the rioters. The Riot Act was finally

read to the rioters, after which the rioters split up with some of them heading to “the house of the justice of peace who had read the act” in order to burn the house while another “much stronger body marched to Newgate” (Romily, 123). Romily’s concise description explains that the rioters “demanded the release of the persons who were confined there for burning the ambassadors’ chapels and this demand not being complied with, broke open the doors set at liberty all the felons and debtors and set fire to the prison and to the keeper’s house which were both presently consumed” (Romily, 123-24).

The description within *Fanaticism* of the burning of Newgate provides a few more details of the actions of the rioters during the actual burning of the building than Romily provided in his discussion of the event. The descriptions of the burning of Newgate found in *Fanaticism* include bias opinions which the author inserted within the factual details. The source of these personal opinions is mysterious given the anonymous nature of the author of the text. An example of one of these bias asides states, “the infernal spirit of national destruction seemed to have so effectually gone forth among the savages, that it is not easy to say what would have satisfied them.” The author thus expresses his opinion that the rioters are “savages” that desire “national destruction” (*Fanaticism*, 52).

The *Fanaticism* account also details how the rioters set Newgate on fire. It explains that “a little boy was lifted up” and that this was “(the method they used to fire all the prisons).” The boy “stuck five or six handfuls of tow, dipt in turpentine, upon the door.” The account relates that “At the first touch of fire the door was in flames.” It states that “Every prisoner of every description was turned loose upon the public.” The account then describes that these prisoners “were above three hundred in number” and that “Even three men whom justice had sentenced to

the gallows were released from the condemned cells to merit the gallows a fecund time by fresh crimes” (*Fanaticism*, 52). The author of the account thus reveals his opinion that the criminals would commit more crimes once the rioters set them free.

*The Political Magazine* provides a longer description of the burning of Newgate than other contemporary accounts. The description differs slightly from the accounts found in Romily’s letters and *Fanaticism*, thus reflecting that the authors vary in their opinions of the intentions of the rioters. Romily possesses the most neutral opinion of the rioters since he simply relates the facts of what occurred. The author of *Fanaticism* believes that the rioters were a dangerous body of individuals who possessed the intent of violence. The account emphasizes the rioters planned to bring tow to set the prison on fire. The account also highlights that the rioters released men awaiting execution and who might commit further violence. *The Political Magazine* agrees with *Fanaticism*’s portrayal of the rioters, with the only difference being an increase in detail found within the magazine.

*The Political Magazine* also agrees with *Fanaticism* that “the rioters” were “confined” in Newgate (*Fanaticism*, 52). It states that it was “In this prison the persons apprehended for the riots on Friday night the 2nd were confined” (*The Political*, 85). The account thus reveals that the rioters targeted Newgate to release the rioters held there. However, despite the similarities between the two accounts, *The Political Magazine* and *Fanaticism* disagree on the exact time the rioters attacked Newgate and the method used by the rioters to gain entry into the prison.

*The Political Magazine* account states that the rioters arrived at Newgate a full hour before the time recorded in *Fanaticism*. The magazine recounts that “About fix o’clock in the evening great bodies of the insurgents left the streets adjoining to both houses of parliament and

proceeded to Newgate where they arrived about seven o'clock" (*The Political*, 85). *Fanaticism* in contrast claims that "Newgate was beset about eight on Tuesday evening, and Mr. Akerman, the amiable keeper (for a humane gaoler surely deserves one epithet of praise), was ordered to release the rioters confined there" (*Fanaticism*, 51-52).

The account of *Fanaticism* relates the use of a boy setting the prison on fire, but *The Political Magazine* describes various other methods instead. *Fanaticism* describes that the rioters held a boy up to the door of the prison with tow saturated in turpentine in order to start the fire. *The Political Magazine* instead claims that the rioters used furniture from Mr. Akerman's house as fuel. The magazine describes that the rioters had "piled the greatest part of it against the main gate of the prison and set it on fire, but as it was strongly plated with iron and as the under keepers and turnkeys kept continually sluicing it with water on the inside the fire did not take effect so as to open a passage for them" (*The Political*, 85).

*The Political Magazine* account uniquely includes the failure of the rioters to successfully gain entry with the first bonfire. This failure suggests an ineptitude of the rioters that was hitherto not mentioned by any other contemporary account. Yet, the account also includes direct mention that the rioters "came well prepared for this desperate business" with "fire balls which they threw into Akerman's house and into the prison." The statement reveals the author's belief that "it was evidently a preconcerted attack" (*The Political*, 85).

The magazine also relates that the rioters found multiple means of entering the prison. It details that "Whilst the attack at the main gate was going on other rioters assaulted the little gate which leads into Newgate Street." The account explains that, "with iron crows, iron palisades, pick axes and sledge hammers" the rioters "forced an entrance." Some rioters "having procured

ladders” then “scaled the high walls.” Other rioters entered “Akerman’s house” and then “broke into the prison by means of a door of communication” situated within the house. The rioters “soon penetrated through all the different wards and cells of this strong prison which to look at might well be deemed impregnable and fit to stand a regular siege” (*The Political*, 85).

The account also describes the character and behavior of the prisoners who the rioters freed during the attack. Like *Fanaticism* it asserts that some of the men released were awaiting execution. *The Political Magazine* then goes into further detail than *Fanaticism* regarding the released prisoners. It gives the identity of the three condemned men who the rioters set free. The magazine states that some “of the prisoners were under sentence of death and three of them Sparrow, Carr, and Early, for highway robberies were to have been executed in about thirty six hours, that is on the Thursday morning”. The account notes that “Upwards of three hundred felons” escaped. It then utilizes sensationalist journalism by stating that the rioters captured at the scene of the burning of the Sardinian chapel gained freedom “to prey again upon the peaceable inhabitants” (*The Political*, 85). The author desired to instill fear of the escaped prisoners in readers of the magazine. The magazine also obviously held a negative opinion of the rioters and prisoners.

*The Political Magazine* states that “prisoners of every denomination were set at liberty.” The magazine describes how the prisoners strove to blend into the crowd once they escaped. The account states that “most of them were led out of the door that leads to the sessions house.” It describes that “The irons of the felons were mostly knocked off at two smith’s shops not far distant from the prison.” The account relates that one prisoner “was so affected at his unexpected deliverance that he fainted whilst his friends and associates were knocking off his irons.” Other

prisoners “were carried off in hackney coaches the better to conceal their fetters” (*The Political*, 85).

Another account which mentions prisoners released from Newgate is a newspaper entitled the *General Evening Post*. An article in Issue 7221 of the newspaper, printed on Saturday, 10 June 1780, describes how on:

“Saturday last Mr. Akerman giving some necessary directions about the repair of Newgate to the workmen there employed saw standing near him a person of the name of Hyde who had formerly been a prisoner in Newgate and who had threatened Mr. Akerman on the very afternoon towards the close of which his property was destroyed, his house burnt, and the jail likewise set on fire.” (*General Evening Post*)

Like many of the prisoners who the rioters freed during the attack, a prisoner named Hyde is re-apprehended in this instance. As the article relates, “Mr. Akerman immediately collared him and conveyed him to the compters.” The article reveals the attitude of London citizens regarding the burning of Newgate. When Mr. Akerman “passed along the streets” with the recaptured prisoner “many persons congratulated Mr. Akerman on his having seized Hyde, all of them declaring that they saw him active in the outrage committed on his property and that of the public.” The newspaper reveals that Londoners desired to have the prisoners recaptured. The article thus also informs the citizens how many Newgate prisoners had been re-apprehended. It states that “There are now in the poultry compters 130 disorderly persons and the gaol is very much crowded” and that “300 of the rioters are already secured who will be tried in a few days before the special commissioners” (*General Evening Post*).

Another notable action by the mob during the riots was their attack upon a house of a distiller in order to obtain the distiller's alcohol. Romily relates that the rioters "threatened to pull down" the house "of a Catholic, a distiller in Holborn." He gives the interesting bit of information that the distiller in an attempt "to save his house told the rioters that he would give them liquor as long as they pleased." The rioters agreed "and the spirituous liquors were accordingly handed out to the mob in large vessels." Romily describes how the rioters then "drank to such a degree that numbers of them lay intoxicated in the middle of the way and some died." Romily concludes his description by lamenting that "all this could not save the poor man's house which was set fire to the following night" (Romily, 126).

*Fanaticism* explains that though "Mr. Langdale" was "a distiller of respectable character at Holborn Bridge" he was considered by the rioters a "criminal" for "being a Roman Catholic." The account relates that the rioters attacked Mr. Langdale's "house" as well as "some houses where he kept some materials of his distillery and where his son resided near Fetter Lane in Holborn" (*Fanaticism*, 53). The author laments that in addition to the damage done to Mr. Langdale's livelihood, others who were "innocent" of being Catholic and who lived in the surrounding "neighborhood" lost property as well. It is described that "The flames by which the premises and spirits were consumed" then spread beyond Mr. Langdale's targeted property.

*Fanaticism* also describes the efforts of the military during the attack upon the distiller's house. It reveals sympathy for the government, stating that "A detachment of the Northumberland militia, as well as Colonel Holroyd who attended them, deserve no common praises for their coolness, humanity, and intrepidity." The account explains that the militia found they "were under the necessity of firing." *Fanaticism* continues to defend the military by



claiming that more rioters died from their own actions than from military force. It states that “many more, both women and men (as the ruins have every day discovered) perished by the effects of the destructive liquors upon their feverish and inflamed bodies, than by the merited vengeance of the soldiery” (*Fanaticism*, 54). Thus the account demonstrates the self-destruction of the mob and the anonymous author’s belief in the justice of the militia using force against the rioters.

*The Political Magazine* relates as Romily did that the distiller warded off the rioters from destroying his house for one night through the distribution of alcohol to the mob. The account explains that “The party that left Newgate proceeded down Snow Hill and at Mr. Langdale’s distiller at Holborn Bridge they stopped and threatened to demolish his house and destroy his effects and stock.” It is explained that “To appease them spirits were brought in tubs and pails and distributed to all who chose to partake which warded off the blow for that night” (*The Political*, 435).

The magazine like Romily then relates that the rioters returned to Mr. Langdale’s house the next evening on Wednesday, 7 June 1780. It describes that a “body of the insurgents went again to the unfortunate Mr. Langdale’s at Holborn Bridge where the night beforehand all this day and part of the evening they had spirits brought out to them in as great plenty as they chose to drink or to call for.” The account includes the timeline of the actions of the rioters during that night. It states that “About seven o’clock in the evening” the rioters “forced their way into the still house” and “rolled out the casks of sprits.” The magazine emphasizes that “numbers” of the rioters “drank immoderately.” It also describes that “Whilst this was going on others were plundering and gutting the inside of the house.” The account describes how the rioters “threw or

brought out every thing that would burn and all the empty casks from the still house piled them up opposite to St. Andrew's church and made an immense bonfire." The magazine details that by "About nine at night the back part of the still house was set on fire" and that "the spirits that remained soon blazed up with incredible fury shooting upwards as they caught in columns of fire." Just as *Fanaticism* mentioned the damage done to surrounding properties, the magazine explains that "The flames soon reached the back parts of the houses in Field Lane where several were burned down." The account continues describing events by the hour. It recounts how in the next hour, "About ten o'clock" the flames "reached the front of Mr. Langdale's dwelling house which with two houses on one side and one on the other side were entirely consumed" (*The Political*, 439).

*The Political Magazine* describes the actions of the militia in great detail. It begins by recalling that "About eleven, that is half an hour after the house was set on fire, a party of the Northumberland militia came into Holborn" (*The Political*, 439). The account emphasizes that the moment the militia "appeared before the bonfire in front of Mr. Langdale's house the insurgents attacked them." In response to the attack upon them the militia "then discharged their pieces but as they were only loaded with powder no harm was done." The magazine explains that "firing upon the rioters with only powder" was meant "to intimidate the ruffians for strict orders had been given to use every lenient measure before coming to extremity". Unfortunately, the experiment "had no effect" and since "The insurgents" were "continuing their attack" and given that "one of the officers" was "very much hurt" the military decided that it was "absolutely necessary to fire with ball" (*The Political*, 440).

*The Political Magazine* assures its readers that despite the fact that the militia was forced to begin to fire with live ammunition the soldiers took great care to ensure that no innocent citizens were harmed through this action. The account describes how “their officer drew them up on the north side of Holborn fronting the bonfire and the house on fire so that no person could be hurt but those who were rioting round the fire burning the furniture and casks and those who were still in the house plundering it.” The magazine relates that “By this second firing two or three were killed.” The account emphasizes that the “judicious conduct of the officer deserves great praise for the streets were much crowded with people moving their most valuable goods as they could not know where the fire would stop” (*The Political*, 440).

*The Political Magazine* like *Fanaticism* describes that the rioters injured themselves with liquor, assisting the militia in their own destruction. The account relates that many of the rioters “were either burned, suffocated, or smothered by the falling in of the roofs, for many bodies partly burned and others without any marks of burning have been dug out of the ruins.” However, the magazine mostly focuses upon the self-destruction of the mob through liquor. It recounts how “Both in the upper house of Mr. Langdale’s and in the lower house at Holborn Bridge numbers of the miscreants got so intoxicated that they fell upon the spot.” The rioters drank the liquor with zeal for, “Within a few hours after the casks had been turned out numbers on both sides of the streets were seen lying on the ground dead drunk.” Some rioters even “died of the excessive draughts which they took of the unrectified spirits” (*The Political*, 440). The liquor did not solely result in the destruction of rioters. The liquor was also a key ingredient in the burning of the property of Mr. Langdale and his neighbors. The account states that “Such vast numbers of casks of spirits were rolled out of the upper still houses and staved that the

kennel ran with spirits.” The account explains that these “spirits” were mistaken “for water” and thus “was damned up and served to the engines playing on the houses adjoining to the lower house at Holborn Bridge” (*The Political*, 440).

*The Political Magazine* provides “A very full and particular account and description of the rioters executed and behavior at the place of execution” (*The Political*, 469). One of the rioters tried is Edward Dennis, the hangman. His trial occurred on Monday, 3 July 1780. The account states that “Edward Dennis, the hangman was indicted for assisting in demolishing the house of Mr. Boggis in New Turnstile, Holborn on Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of June.” The account describes Dennis’s actions during the riot. It states that “Several witnesses swore to his burning the furniture, huzzaing, and encouraging his companions who appeared to be about 300 in number.” The account also describes his behavior during the trial, stating that “His defense was that in passing some of the mob knew him, called him Bloody Jack Ketch and threatened to throw him into the fire if he did not assist.” *The Political Magazine* claims that during the trial “The witnesses were all asked if they saw the mob force him to assist” and that all the witnesses “replied they believed his acts were voluntary and not forced.” The magazine records the end result of Dennis’s trial as being that “The jury brought in their verdict, guilty, death” (*The Political*, 495).

The account includes the hopeless plea of the condemned man. It relates how “The prisoner then fell on his knees and implored mercy declared his will was innocent though he had been compelled and appealed to the sheriff’s aldermen and lord mayor to vouch that his general character had been that of a peaceable quiet man” (*The Political*, 495). The account also describes Dennis at his execution. The magazine refers to him as “Jack Ketch” in the description

of his execution, which was the name that he claimed the rioters called him. He apparently made the pitiful appeal that “his son...would starve” unless the government gave his son some employment since Ketch would be dead and no longer able to provide for his son (*The Political*, 499).

Lord George Gordon is such an important figure to the understanding of the Gordon Riots that this study will focus on him separately from the events of the riots. The contemporary historical documents dedicate a large percentage of their pages to a consideration of the character and behavior of Lord George Gordon and the degree to which he contributed to the cause of the riots. The opinions of various contemporary texts regarding the extent to which Lord George Gordon caused the riots, whether consciously or unconsciously, have already been outlined. Chapter 4 will further develop the image of Lord George Gordon provided within the contemporary documents rather than simply stating the opinions of the authors of those texts as to whether Gordon caused the riots or not. An understanding of the historical portrayal of Lord Gordon will be vital to the comprehension of the extent to which Dickens borrowed from contemporary documents to create the character of Lord Gordon within his novel *Barnaby Rudge*. Familiarity with the aspects of Gordon’s character and behavior that Dickens would have found in contemporary documents assists recognition of Dickens’s artistic additions to the image of Lord Gordon. Chapter 4 will focus entirely on providing such an understanding of the historical image of Gordon in order to place in context the later analysis of Dickens’s portrayal of Gordon in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCING THE HISTORICAL GORDON

A focus of the contemporary texts regarding the Gordon Riots was Lord George Gordon, believed by some to be the leader of those riots. The historical image presented of Lord George Gordon within a variety of contemporary texts should be considered. This chapter will compare the aspects of Lord Gordon which these contemporary texts in order to reveal the popular contemporary depictions of Lord Gordon and to better understand the opinions of the authors of the texts regarding Gordon's role in the cause of the riot. The chapter considers Gordon's eccentricity of character, his charitable works in prison, whether outside forces manipulated him, and the degree of his blame or blamelessness for the riots.

Watson's account *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795) possesses many insights into Lord Gordon's character. Watson admits to the "eccentricity of his character," yet insists that he was a good man who it was impossible to "corrupt" (Watson, 1). Watson claims that Gordon "was an enemy to plunder and devastation" and "was shocked with the violence" of the riots (Watson, 22). Watson reveals that he believes Gordon conducted himself like a gentleman. He states, for example, that on the day of Gordon's trial, Gordon "entered the Hall elegantly and appropriately dressed in a suit of black velvet: his deportment was firm and undaunted" (Watson, 24). He states that "Many Advocates for reform, from a dread of anarchy and plunder, have decided too rashly on the subject and as the newspapers are either in the pay of administration, or under the influence of factious Partisans, no pains have been spared to blacken his Character, and to expose him to popular contempt and hatred thro' the medium of prejudice" (Watson, 31).

*Thomas Holcroft's A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots* (1780) praises Lord Gordon to an extent similar to Watson's account. It claims that Gordon "possesses a great

fun of wit and humor and his temper is withal so sweetened with the quality of good nature that he has never been known to sacrifice it at the shrine of satire” (Holcroft, 41). The author of the account reveals his respect for Gordon by arguing that “no man” had “been more universally attended to in the house than his lordship.” He also claims that Gordon had “said some of the severest and at the same time the wittiest things against both sides of the house” that had ever “been uttered in St. Stephen’s since the day of the celebrated Charles Townshend” (Holcroft, 41). The author of the account states his opinion that “should his lordship fall a sacrifice to his zeal on the present occasion” then citizens will pity Gordon and that “no man ever received a greater share of public respect than his lordship will no doubt meet with” (Holcroft, 41).

The author of *Fanaticism and Treason: or, a Dispassionate History of the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Rebellious Insurrections in June 1780. By a Real Friend to Religion and to Britain* (1780) also believes Lord Gordon possessed an “eccentricity of character” though the account is not as sympathetic towards Gordon as Watson’s narrative. In describing the events in the Houses of Parliament during the petitioner’s march to Parliament on the first day of the riots, the author states that “Lord George did not behave less strangely and disorderly than usual” (*Fanaticism*, 40). This statement suggests that eccentric behavior was typical of Lord Gordon in Parliament. Romily includes a negative portrayal of Gordon’s eccentric character within *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romily, Written by Himself; with a Selection from His Correspondence; Edited by His Sons* (1840). Romily calls Gordon a “madman,” a portrayal of Gordon frequently found in other contemporary accounts as well (Romily, 119).

The only contemporary text that chooses to praise Gordon’s charitable nature is Watson’s account. Watson portrays Gordon as a kind of saint during his final imprisonment. He claims that

“Lord George bore his confinement with uncommon fortitude; he was never heard to complain” and that “No man was more beloved by his fellow prisoners than Lord George” for he “clothed the naked, and fed the hungry” (Watson, 107 and 110). Watson’s account is of course the kindest to Lord Gordon, as they were good friends.

The suggestion that Gordon was manipulated by outside forces is made in detail by *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* (1780). The account has a section devoted entirely to “An account of Lord George Gordon, with facts and observations respecting the real authors of the late insurrections and conflagrations” (*The Political*, 405). The reference to “the real authors” of the riots in such close proximity to the account of Lord Gordon seems to suggest that Lord Gordon was not the mastermind behind the riots, but rather simply an instrument. This is an argument that is continued within the section on Lord Gordon found within the account. The author sets out to claim that enemies of England used Gordon in order to start the riots and thus injure England.

The magazine states at the beginning of the section on Lord Gordon that “It is an observation of Machiavel that in any dangerous enterprise it is always proper to make use of as an instrument some person tainted with insanity” (*The Political*, 407). Such statements placed in the beginning of the account of Lord Gordon set a standard of insanity for Gordon’s character within the account. The author of the account argues foreign enemies could have used Gordon without his knowledge towards a violent, treasonous goal due to the instability of Gordon’s mind. The magazine conjectures that “His intemperate language in parliament must have marked him as a fit instrument for exciting internal commotions to those traitors who for so many years have been unremittingly laboring to divide, to distract and to ruin this nation” (*The Political*,



408). The account even goes so far as to relate the theory that the recent “daring seditious speeches of his in parliament which astonished every rational auditor were not the effusions of his own mind but were infused into him by his political and diabolical prompters” and that Gordon was thus simply a pawn rather than a leader (*The Political*, 408). The account includes these “strange speeches in parliament, from his first in which he quarreled with Lord North to the present time” starting on page 412 of the account (*The Political*, 405). Also included within the magazine are Lord Gordon’s “bold advertisements as president of the Protestant Association,” “His resolute speech at their last meeting,” and his “speeches to the rioters” during the submission of their petition against the act for the papists (*The Political*, 405).

Regardless of whether outside forces manipulated Gordon, the author of *Fanaticism* holds Gordon in part responsible for the riots. He reveals that he feels that Gordon’s “hand-bill from the Protestant Association disavowing the riots, and recommending peace and good order” was insincere, since the next day he was “observed in the house by Mr. Herbert with a blue cockade in his hat” (*Fanaticism*, 47). The author suggests such conduct shows that Gordon was in agreement with the violent proceedings of the rioters, especially since the blue cockade had become a symbol for the riots rather than for the Protestant Association.

Romily gives his own harsh opinion of Gordon in his letters, suggesting that Gordon was to blame for the riots. He describes, as do many other of the accounts, the proceedings in the Houses of Parliament during the march of the petitioners. He observes that though Gordon’s “friends” had “besought him with the greatest earnestness not to excite the people to measures which must be destructive to themselves.” Gordon ignored their advice and spoke to the rioters. Romily shows how Gordon encouraged the mob by telling them that “if they expected redress

they must keep in a body or meet day after day till the Catholic act was repealed.” Romily reveals his disgust of Lord Gordon by stating that “nothing could deter this frantic incendiary till he was by violence forced back into the House” (Romily, 118). The label of “frantic incendiary” accuses Gordon of having been largely responsible for the violence that the rioters committed.

In his 13 June 1780 letter Romily relates that Lord George Gordon “underwent an examination last Friday before the Privy Council during three hours.” Romily reports that the only evidence brought against Lord Gordon was an “inflammatory letter” Gordon sent to a newspaper (Romily, 129) and some correspondence to individuals in Scotland regarding the events of the riots (Romily, 130). Romily admits that there was “no evidence of his having planned any revolution” (Romily, 130). Despite the small amount of evidence against Gordon he was sent as “a prisoner to the tower” (Romily, 130). Romily discusses his impressions of the danger of a man such as Lord Gordon. He admits that in his past interactions with Lord Gordon in Parliament, he had “never thought him a man from who his country had much to dread.” Though Gordon “spoke indeed upon all occasions” Romily had not felt Gordon could be effective in convincing an audience since “his speeches were incoherent and ridiculous” (Romily, 130). However, Romily’s opinion seems to have changed due to the riots. He expresses that he now feels that “dreadful effects” can be created by such “mistaken zeal” as that possessed by Lord Gordon. Romily feels such zeal is especially dangerous in Gordon since his conversational style of speech is, in the opinion of Romily, “most capable of working an effect upon an ignorant audience” (Romily, 131).

A contrasting account which claims that Lord Gordon is not to blame for the riots is found in the sympathetic account *Thomas Holcroft’s A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the*

*Gordon Riots* (1780). There is a section entitled “Anecdotes of the Life of Lord George Gordon” found at the end of the narrative. It is noted in a footnote of the 1944 edition that “It is difficult to accept the anecdotes as having been written by Holcroft since the reading of Lord George Gordon’s character appears to be radically different from that in the preceding pages” (Holcroft, 39). The opinion given in the footnote is that it is likely that the printer of the manuscript chose to write the anecdotes in order to lengthen the narrative. The footnote claims that “It may even be conjectured that this author was more sympathetic towards the protestant association and its president than was Holcroft” (Holcroft, 39).

The anecdotes reveal sympathy towards Lord Gordon and the belief that Gordon had not striven to start a revolution. The account states that “we are well assured that his lordship had no idea of producing the dreadful consequences that ensued from assembling the association” (Holcroft, 41). The narrative strives to portray Lord Gordon as an individual who had good intentions. It claims that Gordon only had the petitioners gather because he “was well convinced at the same time that unless the petition of the protestants was strengthened by an association there was no reason to apprehend that any regard would be paid to it” (Holcroft, 41).

The Political Magazine is perhaps a more neutral account on the subject of whether Gordon is to blame for the riots. It includes a detailed description of Gordon’s “examination before the privy council” after his arrest (*The Political*, 405). The magazine provides further information regarding the evidence against Gordon. It admits that within Gordon’s inflammatory letter he “annexed a kind of exhortation for the preservation of peace and good order.” The author explains, however, that Gordon’s prosecutors did not feel Gordon had urged for order strongly enough in the letter (*The Political*, 444). The account relates how Gordon stated that

“he had not foreseen these effects in all the degree to which they had extended did not mean them and was sorry for them” (*The Political*, 444). However, the author then points out that Gordon did not have such a satisfactory reply when asked why, if he was sorry for the consequences, did all of his “letters convey an implied approbation of these disturbances” (*The Political*, 444). Thus Gordon was sent back to the tower to await trial. The Privy Council felt that Gordon had been:

“principally instrumental in convening the rioters multitude which had for six several days and nights infested the streets of the metropolis and that he had been by his speeches &c abetting in producing the great and irreparable mischief to his majesty’s loyal and faithful subjects which had subsequently arisen.” (*The Political*, 444)

The accounts in the June and July issues in 1780 of *The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* do not include descriptions of Gordon’s trial regarding his role in the riots. Therefore, it is worth noting here the outcome of that trial as described in Watson’s 1795 narrative *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct*. The account relates that Gordon “suffered a rigorous imprisonment for eight months” in the tower “under a charge of high treason” (Watson, 23). Watson then explains that on the “5<sup>th</sup> of February” Gordon “was conveyed from the Tower to the Court of King’s Bench” for his trial. The trial was “twenty hours” and ended “with a verdict” from the jury of “NOT GUILTY” (Watson, 24).

Now that the study has examined the contemporary documents in order to gain an understanding of the portrayals of significant aspects of the riots and of the important figure of Lord George Gordon, Chapters 5 and 6 will consider the extent to which Dickens borrowed from

these historical texts when forming his own images of the riots and of Gordon within his novel *Barnaby Rudge*. Chapter 5 will closely study the manner in which Dickens portrayed the riot proceedings in his novel through the inclusion or exclusion of details from the contemporary documents already considered. The chapter will thus reveal the manner in which the historical documents influenced Dickens and will indicate where Dickens made his own artistic additions when describing the riots. Chapter 6 will consider Dickens's use of the historical image of Gordon in order to describe the Gordon Riots to a fuller degree within his novel. Chapters 5 and 6 combine in this study to provide comprehension of Dickens's own opinion of the cause of the Gordon Riots and to further examine Dickens as an artist through an examination of his own aesthetic additions to the historical accounts of the riots and of Gordon. These chapters reveal that Dickens's view was that the desire of the lower classes to rebel against their social condition caused the Gordon Riots. Dickens's view of the cause of the riots is contrary to the common historical assumption that religious zealots who protested the reinstatement of rights to Catholics caused the riots. The chapters also reveal the way in which Dickens's use of the historical documents and his own additions to the contemporary accounts of the riots and of Lord Gordon furthered his themes of alcoholism, insanity and poverty found within *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens designed those themes to comment upon the social struggles of the lower classes which Dickens argued in his novel were the very reasons that the lower classes began the Gordon Riots.

## CHAPTER 5: DICKENS'S INTERPRETATION OF THE MOB

Dickens's choices when writing his historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* to include or omit various aspects of the descriptions of the riots found in the contemporary texts discussed in Chapter 3 of this study will be analyzed. This chapter will consider each of the aspects of the riots described in Chapter 3 in order to compare and contrast Dickens's portrayal of those same aspects within his novel. The descriptions considered are once again, the Papists Act of 1778 which the petitioners protested, the assembly of petitioners at St. George's Fields, the description of the petitioners when they arrived at Parliament, the mistreatment of the Parliament members, discussions that occurred within Parliament, the attack on the chapels, the number of rioters captured, the burning of the prison Newgate, the assault on the distiller's house at Holborn Hill, the destruction of the vast amounts of liquor flowing through the streets, the actions of the military, and the behavior of the hangman Edward Dennis during his imprisonment and execution. The goal of this chapter is to determine which contemporary texts Dickens chose to borrow from when recounting each of these proceedings and to convey how these decisions aided Dickens in his portrayal of his opinion of the cause of the riots.

Dickens acquired his description of the Papists Act of 1778 from Thomas Holcroft's narrative. Dickens describes the act as "an act for abolishing the penal laws against Roman Catholic priests, the penalty of perpetual imprisonment denounced against those who educated children in that persuasion, and the disqualification of all members of the Romish church to inherit real property in the United Kingdom by right of purchase or descent" (Dickens, 347). Holcroft had included similar information, such as that the Papists Act of 1778 would abolish "perpetual imprisonment" (Holcroft, 13) and that the right to inherit to property would be given back to "every person and persons having or claiming any lands tenements or hereditaments

under titles not hitherto litigated” (Holcroft, 13-14). Dickens mentions the act only to discuss that the rioters were ignorant of the purpose of the petition. Dickens explains that the “matters” which the act dwelt in were “so far removed from the business and bosoms of the mass” that the Protestant Association would have been unable to gather many members if they advertised such purposes in detail (Dickens, 347).

Another way in which Dickens diverged from Holcroft’s description of the Papists Act of 1778 was Dickens omitted any mention of the demand of the act that Catholics renounce aspects of their religion. Dickens only included the positive effects of the act. Mentioning the extent to which the repeal remained discriminatory to Catholics would require more of an emphasis upon religious issues than Dickens desired. Dickens meant only to briefly refer to the Papists Act of 1778 in order to convey that the petitioners were not familiar with the act. Dickens claims the petitioners received handbills that neglected to explain the act. The handbills used “vague rumors” that “a secret power was mustering against the government for undefined and mighty purposes.” They did not mention religion except to state that “the Popish powers” were striving “to degrade and enslave England” (Dickens 347-48). Dickens establishes with this explanation that the petitioners did not join the association due to religious opposition to the return of rights to Catholics.

Dickens uses much of the descriptions within contemporary texts of the assembly of the petitioners at St. George’s Fields. However, he omitted and added various details to convey the image of the petitioners that best fit his claim that the riots were not due to religious intolerance. Dickens chose to include the same time given by *The Political Magazine* of when the petitioners were told to assemble at St. George’s Fields. Dickens most likely chose to include this fact as a

way to establish historical accuracy. Yet, despite his choice to follow *The Political Magazine's* information regarding the time the petitioners gathered, Dickens declined to set a number of the amount of people who. The magazine had estimated anywhere from "50,000" to "100,000" (*The Political*, 416). Dickens had earlier mentioned the figure of 40,000 for the number of members in the Protestant Association. Dickens later uses the same number of 40,000 to describe Gordon's "men" who deserted him upon his arrest (Dickens, 663). However, upon describing the crowd that gathered at St. George's Fields, Dickens chooses to omit a specific number and states simply that an "immense multitude was collected." Through declining to state a specific number Dickens is able to suggest a crowd that may have possibly included individuals who were not members of the Protestant Association. This suggestion would agree with the contemporary texts such as Watson's narrative which suggested that unsavory characters joined the gathering in order to cause mischief rather than for the purpose of proposing the petition in question (Dickens, 446).

Dickens borrowed the information from *The Political Magazine* that the petitioners, upon meeting in the field, "paraded in different divisions with flags, marshalling themselves in ranks" (*The Political*, 416). However, Dickens worded the fact that the petitioners were bearing flags in a way which omitted any suggestion that the petitioners organized in a military manner. While the magazine used such terms as "divisions" and "ranks" to suggest an army rather than an unorganized crowd, Dickens states simply that they were "bearing flags of various kinds and sizes" (Dickens, 446). It was Dickens's desire to convey the image of a gathering of men who had convened not for any serious cause but simply because they could be a part of something exciting and rebellious.



Dickens adds various details in order to portray the gathering as ridiculous given the amalgamation of individuals unconcerned with the contents of the petition. One example of this was Dickens's addition of an image of confusion of some petitioners as to the desired formation. He does include the description common in contemporary texts of "some sections marching to and fro in military array," yet he contrasts this with his own unique image of "others drawn up in circles, squares, and lines" (Dickens, 446). Dickens admits that perhaps there were some among the crowd who were perhaps more prepared for such a march than others. However, Dickens manages to emphasize with his humorous addition of men gathering in inconsistent formations that there were plenty of petitioners who were clueless as to how to participate in such a gathering. The idea of marching in circles conveys a sufficiently awkward picture. Rather than the image of military organization that *The Political Magazine* conveyed, Dickens offers instead the image of confused chaos.

For his purposes of conveying the crowd as unserious about the petition itself, Dickens borrows the descriptions from some contemporary texts which claimed that the crowd included some of the lowest characters in London. Obviously Dickens did not choose to include the image that Watson had given of the petitioners "dressed in their best cloths" (Watson, 20). Instead, Dickens chose to borrow from Romily the image of a crowd filled "in a great measure of the lowest rabble" whom were "utterly ignorant of the very purport of the petition" (Romily, 115). In describing the procession from the fields to Parliament, Dickens mentions that Lord Gordon was surrounded by "sundry ruffians, of most unpromising appearance" (Dickens, 449). Dickens then later describes the crowd as "sprinkled doubtless here and there with honest zealots, but composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse of London" (Dickens, 453). Dickens's

choice to portray the crowd as originally composed of unsavory characters reveals his political opinion that the Gordon Riots were not a result of religious differences between Protestants and Catholics, but rather the result of a large group of desperate individuals gathering together to rebel. Dickens makes a point to mention the “honest zealots” in order to suggest that the number of individuals present who were gathering for religious reasons was extremely low compared to the number of individuals gathered for non-religious purposes. Dickens also expresses his opinion of the cause of the existence of such desperate characters within London. Dickens claims that the “growth” of such delinquents “was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police” (Dickens, 453). Dickens’s inclusion of this information reveals his belief that the riots stemmed from class issues rather than religious ones.

Dickens suggests in his work that there were members of the “scum and refuse of London” already present at the original gathering in St. George’s Fields (Dickens, 453). He mentions that there were “sundry ruffians, of most unpromising appearance” in the original “mob” that “divided from its first assemblage into four divisions” in order to march to Parliament (Dickens, 449). By stating this information Dickens makes it clear that he does not agree with the claim in Watson’s account that it was not until the crowd gathered at Parliament that “a crowd of vagabonds mingled themselves with the peaceable citizens” (Watson, 21). Dickens does not desire to portray the original crowd at St. George’s Fields as a serious organization of men who all believed strongly in the petition. Dickens instead claims that there are some amongst those at St. George’s Fields who are so far removed from the Protestant concerns of the petition that they “had never heard a hymn or psalm in all their lives.” The emphasis on the fact that there were members of the association who had “heard a hymn”

characterizes at least those petitioners as unconcerned with religious issues and thus furthers Dickens's argument that the rioters did not have religious motivation (Dickens, 447).

Dickens borrows from *The Political Magazine* the description of the petitioners arriving at Parliament. Dickens uses the exact phrase from the magazine to describe the time the petitioners arrived, stating that by "two and three o'clock" the crowd had gathered (Dickens, 452). Dickens most likely chose to do this to add another historically accurate piece of information to his novel. Such historical accuracies serve to further the authority of his account, thus enforcing the persuasiveness of his argument that class differences rather than religious ones caused the Gordon Riots. To further his argument Dickens adds his own descriptions of the mob which serve to characterize them as lower class figures. The contemporary accounts used diction reminiscent of a battle in which the rioters are an enemy army; however, Dickens suggests that the crowd is something much more beastly and lowly. Dickens does not simply state as the contemporary account *Fanaticism* does that "The lobby of the House was full of rioters" and that "the House itself was literally besieged" (*Fanaticism*, 38). Dickens instead describes the crowd by stating that "The air" was "filled with execrations, hoots, and howlings" and "The mob...raged and roared, like a mad monster as it was, unceasingly, and each new outrage served to swell its fury" (Dickens, 453). By creating a more wild image of the mob Dickens is able to further his claim that the desire of the lower classes of London to rise up in an untamed, unplanned effort to release their bitterness about their situation in life caused the violence of the riots.

Upon describing the extent to which the petitioners filled the avenues around Parliament and the lobby within Dickens borrows an image from *The Political Magazine*. The image is of

how “The petition was carried on a man’s head with the signatures of the petitioners on parchment which made such a huge load that the bearer could but just move under it” (*The Political*, 416). The picture conveyed is a rather ridiculous and exaggerated one, given the suggested weight of the petition. *The Political Magazine* describes this image during the march from the fields to Parliament. Dickens chose to include it when Lord Gordon entered Parliament. He relates that Lord Gordon entered Parliament “preceded by a man who carried the immense petition on a porter’s knoe through the lobby to the door of the House of Commons” (Dickens, 453). The emphasis on the close proximity of the ridiculous image to Lord Gordon furthers the already foolish image of Gordon that Dickens had been painstakingly crafting. Dickens also imparts a greater senselessness upon the goal of presenting the petition through the inclusion of this ridiculous image during the presentation of the document. Dickens mentions that the crowd follows the petition and Lord Gordon into Parliament. He states that “Thus the members were not only attacked in their passage through the streets, but were set upon within the very walls of Parliament” (Dickens, 453). Dickens conveys the sense that Lord Gordon and his petition contributed to further disorderly conduct from an already disruptive crowd. He also emphasizes the disrespect of the petitioners to suggest they are defiant of authority. The characteristic of defiance against authority amongst the rioters would strengthen Dickens’s argument that the lower classes were the instigators of the riot and that class conflict rather than religious differences caused the riots.

Dickens includes many of the descriptions from contemporary accounts of the rioters’ mistreatment of the Parliament members. Dickens included such descriptions in order to strengthen his argument that the rioters vented their social grievances through violence against

members of government. It would seem logical that if the true goal of the crowd was to get the petition passed then they would not have physically abused the men with the power to pass the petition. Watson had stated that during the march to Parliament “a crowd of vagabonds mingled themselves with the peaceable citizens” and “treated the members very roughly, and insulted the peers”(Watson, 21). Watson therefore argued that it was not the original petitioners who had attacked the members of Parliament. It would be counterproductive for the petitioners to insult the men voting on the petition. Watson’s solution for maintaining that image of sincerity of the petitioners was to thus suggest that others carried out the mistreatment. Dickens, however, did not desire to preserve such a portrayal of loyalty to the petition amongst those gathered. He instead desired to convey the sense that dangerous individuals had been a part of the Protestant Association and thus a part of the original crowd at St. George’s Fields. Dickens makes a point to show that the “members of both Houses of Parliament” met with ill-treatment while “compelled to fight and force their way” through the “vast throng” that was created “when the three great parties” from St. George’s fields “met at Westminster.” That “vast throng” was composed, as already mentioned, of “the very scum and refuse of London” (Dickens, 452-53). Dickens also omits the distinction made by *The Political Magazine* that “It was remarked that the part of the procession which was preceded by the bag-pipers was remarkably regular and orderly but that the people who went before the associators to clear the way had the true aspect of abandoned vagabonds” (*The Political*, 416). Dickens does not mention any “orderly” individuals in the crowd (*The Political*, 416). In excluding such a difference between those within the crowd, Dickens further suggests that unsavory characters composed the crowd and thus strengthens his claim that class was the cause of the riot.

One detail that Dickens included from the contemporary accounts was the abuse of the wigs of the Parliament members. Just as *Fanaticism* relates how “powder was beaten out of every head” (*Fanaticism*, 37), Dickens describes that the members of Parliament arrived “covered with the powder which had been cuffed and beaten out of their hair” (Dickens, 453). However, unlike *Fanaticism*, Dickens chooses to exclude the specific names of the members of Parliament that the rioters attacked. Dickens’s purpose for describing the attacks on the members of Parliament was not simply to present historical details, but instead to argue that the petition did not cause the riot.

When Dickens includes the story of the attack upon Lord Boston he again omits names, only referring to Lord Boston as “One lord” who “was so long in the hands of the populace, that the Peers as a body resolved to sally forth and rescue him” (Dickens, 453). The account of the mistreatment of Lord Boston is most likely taken from the account *Fanaticism*. Dickens excludes the names of those who had planned to save Lord Boston as well. *Fanaticism* does, however, include the names. It states that “Lord Radnor” had “proposed that some of the members should immediately go out to the rioters, and endeavor, by their presence, to extricate his Lordship” (*Fanaticism*, 34).

Dickens seems to have felt that the riots were more of a spontaneous decision by many disruptive individuals than a pre-planned event, though he does suggest that Gordon provided the environment for such a riot. Given this view, Dickens chose to omit any mention of the warnings that Parliament had of the intent of the petitioners to gather at St. George’s Fields. The contemporary account *Fanaticism* records that Parliament did not discuss these warnings on the day that the crowd presented the petition. It refers to the warning that Parliament had by stating

that the ministry had met upon the subject of Lord George's alarming advertisement; and that the advertisement written by Lord Gordon warned the magistrates of Westminster of the expected mob" (*Fanaticism*, 34). Dickens's exclusion of this fact serves to remove the cause of the riot further away from Lord Gordon and towards the actions of the socially discontented "scum of London" (Dickens, 453). Dickens had made his own fictional additions to establish members of the crowd as motivated by social discontent rather than religious concerns. He characterized Sim Tappertit, for example, as a disgruntled apprentice who felt mistreated by his master. Dickens demonstrates Tappertit's resentment towards his master through explaining that one of the goals of the society of apprentices which Tappertit led was "vengeance on their Tyrant Masters (of whose grievous and insupportable oppression no 'prentice could entertain a moment's doubt)" (Dickens, 115).

Dickens conveys the spontaneity of the riot through his inclusion of the conversations of General Conway and Gordon's relative during Gordon's speech to the petitioners in the lobby of Parliament. Some contemporary texts used the scene to suggest that Gordon encouraged the riot. However, Dickens's additions to the scene portray the crowd becoming violent with very little influence from Gordon. *The Political Magazine* relates that General Conway told Gordon, "My lord, I am a military man and I shall think it my duty to protect the freedom of debate in this House by my sword" (Political, 420). Dickens's novel uses nearly the same sentence, for it relates that General Conway told Gordon, "I am a soldier, you may tell them, and I will protect the freedom of this place with my sword" (Dickens, 456). Dickens's addition that takes blame away from Gordon is his description of the reaction of the crowd as they "faltered and stared at each other with irresolute and timid looks" after seeing Gordon scolded by his relative (Dickens,

457). Gordon's relative had just stated to Gordon that "If a man among this crowd, whose uproar strikes us deaf, crosses the threshold of the House of Commons, I swear to run my sword that moment – not into his, but into your body!" (Dickens, 457). Dickens chooses to show members of the crowd as the encouraging force rather than Gordon. The crowd was in the process of retreating, for "Many tried to turn towards the door" and "some of the faintest-hearted cried they had best go back, and called to those behind to give way" (Dickens, 457). However, the actions of defiant Hugh halted the retreat. He "Without the delay of an instant,...threw himself headlong over the banisters into the lobby below" (Dickens, 457). Dickens relates that "with a great shout, both crowds threw themselves against the doors pell-mell, and besieged the House in earnest" (Dickens, 457). Dickens characterized Hugh as bitter about how society treated him, more like "a mongrel dog than a man" (Dickens, 378). Hugh is an important character amongst the rioters given that he is of the lower classes that Dickens claims are responsible for the riot. Dickens also places some of the blame of the renewed attack of the rioters upon Gashford, the secretary of the Protestant Association. The novel had already demonstrated Gashford to be a manipulative force dictating Gordon's actions and in this case it showed he was capable of moving Hugh to action as well. Dickens points out that moments before Hugh orders the crowd to "Rush on," "Gashford" had "whispered" to "Hugh" in order to convince him to lead the rioters in attacking Parliament (Dickens, 457).

Contemporary accounts seem to agree that the military easily dispersed. *The Political Magazine* says simply that "About eleven o'clock the house adjourned and the mob being by this time gone off the guard were ordered home" (*The Political*, 421). The account in *Fanaticism* gives an even more detailed explanation, stating that though the petitioners were so disruptive



that “The messengers were, finally, from absolute necessity, dispatched for the guards,” it happened that “Before the guards arrived Lord George had desired the petitioners to disperse, telling them to trust in God for the accomplishment of their business” (*Fanaticism*, 41).

However, Dickens chooses to portray the mob as stubbornly standing their ground, for he states that “The Riot Act was read, but not a man stirred” (Dickens, 458). Dickens then describes further military involvement, unreported by any contemporary account, occurring on the first day of the riots. Dickens describes “the Horse Guards...riding in among the crowd” and “rapidly clearing the ground” (Dickens, 458).

Dickens chooses to change the timeline of when the Riot Act was read. According to Romily’s 9 June 1780 letter, “About five o’clock the rioters were become so outrageous that there was no possibility of awaking them but by reading the Riot Act, which (you know) gives a right to fire upon the mob if they do not disperse” (Romily, 123). Romily described in his letter that the Riot Act was read on Tuesday when Parliament met a second time in order to consider the petition. Dickens, however, has the Riot Act read on the first day the crowd presented the petition. By claiming that the military took action the first night of the riots, Dickens intensifies the sense that the determination of the petitioners to revolt. Dickens thus places further blame on the rioters rather than upon the inactivity of the military as some of the contemporary texts had done. Dickens diverges from the historical timeline a second time as well. He mentions the reading of the Riot Act when the rioters are attacking Lord Mansfield’s house. None of the contemporary texts mention the Riot Act being read at this time. Dickens thus conveys that the government strove to quell the violence peacefully by reading “the Riot Act” but as “the crowd”

was “still resisting” it became necessary for the soldiers to take more serious measures (Dickens, 599). Dickens thus reveals the determination of the crowd to rebel against the military.

The change in timeline also provides Dickens’s rioters with less reason for the various violent acts that they commit. According to Romily’s letter, the rioters responded to the reading of the Riot Act by dispersing with the “intention to wreak their fury upon the objects of their resentment in other parts of the town.” A portion of the rioters then “marched to Newgate, demanded the release of the persons who were confined there for burning the ambassadors’ chapels” (Romily, 123). In Dickens’s work, however, the Riot Act is read before the rioters carried out any destruction, such as burning the chapels, and certainly far before they attacked Newgate. Dickens makes it clear that the Riot Act was not a source of motivation for the rioters. In *Barnaby Rudge* the rioters become inactive after the Riot Act is read. They mill about the streets or fall asleep until Gashford goads them into action.

Dickens also changes the timeline of the consideration of the petition. The contemporary accounts are clear that the members of Parliament voted on considering the petition Tuesday rather than the first day the crowd presented it. Romily relates in his letters that the result of that vote was “a majority of 190 against 9” in favor of considering the petition the next Tuesday (Romily, 118). Dickens refers to the desire of Parliament to wait to consider the petition when he has Gordon state to the rioters, “They talk of taking your petition into consideration next Tuesday, but we must have it considered now” (Dickens, 456). Yet, Dickens does not mention that the members of Parliament did vote to consider it Tuesday rather than that day. Dickens also has Gashford tell Hugh and Dennis later that night that Parliament had voted on the petition that day. Gashford states, “The petition is rejected by a hundred and ninety-two to six. It’s quite final.

We might have spared ourselves some trouble” (Dickens, 462). Dickens has Gashford make the claim that thus “There is no cause. The cause is lost” (Dickens, 462). Dickens has Gashford deliberately lie to the rioters in order to manipulate them towards violence. Dickens is hinting that Lord Gordon was not the sole cause of the riot and that smarter men such as Gashford encouraged the petitioners to violence. Dickens thus argues in *Barnaby Rudge* that the motivation of the rioters did not involve the petition since they believe the petition Parliament had rejected at this point and that the Protestant cause to be over. Given the supposed rejection of the petition, the riots can no longer be considered as a means through which to have the petition accepted. Dickens thus succeeds in suggesting that the cause of the riot had more to do with dissatisfied citizens than religious zealots.

Dickens’s rioters require “the artful secretary” to goad them towards action. “Dennis, Hugh, and Barnaby” had slackened their activity and were “fast asleep” when Gashford arrives to encourage them towards violence (Dickens, 461). Gashford convinces them to continue rebellion and gives them a target for their destructive mentalities. Gashford suggests a target by slyly stating, ““I hear – but I cannot say whether it be true or false – that the men who are loitering in the streets to-night are half disposed to pull down a Romish chapel or two, and that they only want leaders” (Dickens, 463). Dickens even has Gashford provide the chapel locations to the rioters, for he states they can be found “in Duke Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and in Warwick Street, Golden Square” (Dickens, 463). Dickens borrowed these locations from *The Political Magazine* which relates that on that first night groups of rioters did indeed attack both “the Sardinian ambassador’s chapel in Duke Street, Lincoln’s Inn fields” and “the chapel of the Bavarian Ambassador in Warwick street, Golden Square” (*The Political*, 421).

By having Gashford cause the attacks on the chapels, Dickens argues that anti-Catholicism did not motivate the attacks. Dickens characterized Gashford as a previous Catholic who possessed no sincere loyalty to the Catholic or Protestant causes. Gashford demonstrated his lack of religion through considering the Jewish religion would “suit” him “as well as any other” (Dickens, 350). Given Gashford’s lack of loyalty to any religion, he would only have the rioters destroy Catholic chapels in order to further the violence he desires, rather than to fulfill any kind of revenge against the Catholic faith.

Dickens chooses to add information regarding the attack on the chapels. Dickens’s description of the attack on the chapels uses some details of the looting which contemporary texts included. However, he adds details about the behavior of the rioters in order to suggest their insanity which is a theme that he uses frequently within *Barnaby Rudge*, especially in connection with the characters of Barnaby and Lord Gordon. The suggested insanity among the rioters assists Dickens in arguing against religious motivation as a cause of the riots. Dickens strengthens his theme of insanity by describing “Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis” as looking “like hideous madmen” during the attack on the chapels (Dickens, 465). Dickens provides them with an image of complete disarray in order to further the sense of their madness. He relates that they are “covered with soot, and dirt...their hair hanging wildly about them; their hands and faces jagged and bleeding with the wounds of rusty nails” (Dickens, 465). Dickens also portrays madness among rioters other than Barnaby, Hugh or Dennis. He describes the other rioters as holding “great wooden fragments, on which they spent their rage as if they had been alive, rending them limb from limb and hurling the scattered morsels high into the air” (Dickens, 465).

The pages leading up to the destruction of the chapels and Dickens's description of the rioters after they destroyed the chapels also reveal Dickens's emphasis on alcohol in order to argue that social unrest caused the riots. He uses excessive drinking amongst the rioters as a way to characterize them as lower class individuals dissatisfied with their place in the world. During the scene in which Dickens has Gashford instigate the destruction of the chapels, Dickens has Gashford take advantage of the weakness the rioters had for alcohol. Gashford ensures that there is alcohol in the system of Barnaby, Hugh and Dennis before they leave by stating, "...but you'll drink with me before you go?" The impression is given that Gashford knows this question will be the only invitation necessary to gain the intoxication of his pawns. Dickens demonstrates that Gashford's intent is almost certainly to get them as drunk as possible, for he describes that Gashford "stood among them with a great measure of liquor in his hand, and filled their glasses as quickly and as often as they chose" (Dickens, 463). Later, upon describing the group of rioters with whom Barnaby, Hugh and Dennis allegedly destroyed the chapels, Dickens makes a point of mentioning that among them were "some in a drunken state" to such an extent that they were "unconscious of the hurts they had received from falling bricks, and stones, and beams" (Dickens, 465). Contemporary accounts do not focus upon the use of alcohol among the rioters to the extent that Dickens does.

Dickens follows contemporary accounts by describing the number of rioters captured after the destruction of the chapels. *The Political Magazine* describes how "Thirteen of the rioters were taken into custody" during the attack upon "the chapel of the Bavarian Ambassador in Warwick Street, Golden Square" (*The Political*, 421). Dickens describes twelve rioters being captured that night, a number very close to the one provided in the magazine's account.

However, Dickens chooses to divide the capture of these twelve rioters between the two different locations of Parliament and the chapels rather than having them all captured during the attack on the chapels. The altercation between the guards and the rioters at Parliament is a fictional addition by Dickens. He chose to have a “half-dozen prisoners” captured during that scene (Dickens, 461). Dickens then later only has a “half-a-dozen” rioters taken after the attack upon the chapels that same night (Dickens, 466). Dickens uses the mention of both altercations with the guards to interject social commentary. He states that “the crowd dispersed after a short and bloodless scuffle” because “Hot and drunken though they were, they had not yet broken all bounds and set all law and government at defiance.” Dickens postulates that “Something of their habitual deference to the authority erected by society for its own preservation yet remained among them” (Dickens, 466). Dickens also once again emphasizes the drinking of the rioters by referring to them as “Hot and drunken” (Dickens, 466). He is thus further expressing his view that the riot was more about societal issues than religious issues. He suggests that eventually the rioters did indeed “set all law and government at defiance.” Dickens is arguing that the later violence and destruction carried out by the rioters was due to a resentment towards those authorities “erected by society” (Dickens, 466), as well as resentment that these authorities allowed the rioters to live in conditions that would cause them to be the “scum and refuse of London” that Dickens’s novel had previously claimed them to be (Dickens, 453).

One of the instances in which the mob caused a great deal of destruction, and most likely a time when Dickens would have felt the rioters had finally “set all law and government at defiance” (Dickens, 466) was the burning of the prison Newgate. The contemporary text *Fanaticism* states eloquently the view that the attack on Newgate was most likely indicative of a

riot caused by class difference rather than religious intolerance. The account seems to convey Dickens's own opinion. The author of *Fanaticism* states that "the Protestant religion was made the profane pretext for some of those violences that were committed." He shares his opinion that no one should be so ridiculous as to assume that:

"any possible motive even a false zeal by an possible perversion of human reason could induce men to lay in ashes the capital of the protestant faith or that any pretence of religion could at all have inflamed the minds of those whose object was to destroy all private security by setting loose all those who had been guilty of crimes against the peace of the country." (*Fanaticism*, 102)

The author of *Fanaticism* is thus arguing that the releasing of criminals upon the public would suggest that something other than religious issues caused the riots.

Dickens both agrees with and differs from various contemporary texts regarding the burning of Newgate in an important way. Some contemporary texts such as *The Political Magazine* convey the opinion that the attack upon Newgate was a planned one. Other texts such as Romily's letter insinuate that the attack was an impromptu act of destruction. *The Political Magazine* seems fairly certain that someone planned the attack, for it states that the plan of the rioters was that "The prisons were all to be destroyed that there might be no place to confine the insurgents should any of them be seized" (*The Political*, 437). The magazine describes the other part of the plan to be that "The felons they liberated" would "assist them in their wicked designs" (*The Political*, 437). The account maintains that no one "could plan or attempt to execute such dreadful excesses" except "a combination of our foreign enemies acting by means of their emissaries and by means of our own internal enemies" (*The Political*, 437). The description of

the method of the attack upon Newgate found within *The Political Magazine* indicates that “The insurgents came well prepared for this desperate business, it was evidently a preconcerted attack from the quantity of fire balls which they threw into Akerman’s house and into the prison” (*The Political*, 434). The rioters even had multiple points of entry planned of both “the main gate” and “the little gate which leads into Newgate Street” (*The Political*, 434). The rioters possessed enough organization that “most of” the released prisoners “were led out of the door that leads to the sessions house” by the rioters who had set them free (*The Political*, 434).

Romily, however, portrays the attack upon Newgate as an unplanned event spurred on by the reading of the Riot Act rather than being a predetermined endeavor. When Romily explains that “Upon” the reading of the Riot Act, “a great part of the rioters” dispersed “with an intention to wreak their fury upon the objects of their resentment in other parts of the town,” he directly mentions Newgate as one of these “objects of their resentment.” He recounts that a large group of rioters immediately “marched to Newgate” (Romily, 123). The decision by the rioters to proceed to Newgate right after the reading of the Riot Act portrays the attacks as motivated more by class differences than by religious differences. The burning of Newgate defies the government. The target of their “fury” and “resentment” being a prison rather than a Catholic institution or home also suggests that the riots were not entirely about religious intolerance (Romily, 123). The act suggests resentment of the lower classes that the government did not assuage the poverty that forced many of the lower classes to the desperate acts that resulted in their arrest and imprisonment.

Dickens follows *The Political Magazine* by stating that the division of the mob “into several parties” was “evidently in pursuance of a previous design.” He ensures, however, that he



emphasizes that the majority of the rioters did not plan the attack. He states that “this arrangement” was not “known to the whole crowd” but was instead “the work of a few leaders; who, mingling with the men as they came upon the ground, and calling to them to fall into this or that party, effected it as rapidly as if it had been determined on by a council of the whole number, and every man had known his place” (Dickens, 568-69). Dickens’s mention of such manipulation is akin to the theory of *The Political Magazine* that manipulative forces were behind the attacks.

Dickens also includes aspects of Romily’s interpretation of the attack. He adopts the sense of spontaneity of the attack suggested by Romily. Prior to his description of the attack on Newgate, Dickens had usually portrayed the rioters as unorganized and spontaneous within his novel. He had described that “When they divided into parties and ran to different quarters of the town, it was on the spontaneous suggestion of the moment” (Dickens, 484). He described the movement of the rioters towards destruction through the explanation that, “Without the slightest preparation, saving that they carried clubs and wore the blue cockade, they sallied out into the streets; and with no more settled design than that of doing as much mischief as they could, paraded them at random” (Dickens, 480). Thus it was not surprising that Dickens had the mob exhibit the same chaotic behavior during the attack on Newgate. Rather than carefully leading the prisoners out as the rioters described in *The Political Magazine* are said to have done, Dickens’s rioters seemed more harmful than helpful in their rescue efforts. They simply “danced about” the prisoners “with a frenzied joy” or “rent their clothes and were ready, as it seemed to tear them limb from limb.” The rioters, in their frenzy, left most of the prisoners to fend for themselves, resulting in “a score of prisoners” who “ran to and fro, who had lost themselves in

the intricacies of the prison” (Dickens, 586). Such disorganization seems fitting of the rioters described by Romily who spontaneously decided to attack Newgate upon hearing the Riot Act. The behavior of the mob described by Romily and Dickens suggests a group of rioters who had not planned violence to protest the Papists Act of 1778 but rather a group of lower class individuals who desired to revolt when the opportunity presented itself.

Two other descriptions of the riots that Dickens includes within his work from contemporary texts are the attack on a distiller’s house at Holborn Hill and the image of the vast amounts of liquor flowing through the streets. Both of these descriptions serve Dickens’s purpose of portraying the causes of the riots as class differences and lower class discontent rather than the religious intolerance of Protestants towards Catholics. Certainly, being a Protestant himself, Dickens would not desire to insinuate that the Protestants were the sole cause of the riots. In describing the attack on the distiller, Dickens once again characterizes the rioters as drunken vagabonds who were ignorant as to religious issues. Dickens conveys the rioters as unhappy, desperate individuals who took advantage of a chance to cause destruction as a means of demonstrating their discontent. The aim of the rioters in Dickens’s opinion was to vent their grievances against those more privileged than themselves and against the government whom they felt should be responsible for protecting them from the conditions in which they lived.

Contemporary texts did not emphasize that the reason for the attack upon the distiller was the desire of the rioters to obtain alcohol, nor did they dwell upon the vast amounts of liquor in the streets. *Fanaticism* only claimed that the rioters attacked the “distiller of respectable character at Holborn Bridge” because this “Mr. Langdale was criminal in being a Roman Catholic” (*Fanaticism*, 53-54). Dickens did not agree with this text’s suggestion that the rioters

targeted the distiller because he was a Catholic. Dickens downplays the fact that the distiller is Catholic and concentrates instead upon the fact that the house was full of alcohol desired by the rioters. Dickens's emphasis on the rioters' desire for the alcohol the distiller possessed is found in the statement that the distiller "saw some men thirsting for the treasures of strong liquor which they knew were stored within" (Dickens, 609). The motivation of liquor rather than religion fits Dickens's view of the cause of the riots.

The contemporary text most similar to Dickens's description of the attack on the distiller's houses is *The Political Magazine*. The magazine focuses more on the alcohol than any other contemporary text. The account relates that "numbers of the miscreants got so intoxicated that they fell upon the spot and were either burned suffocated or smothered" (*The Political*, 440). The magazine relates that "Many also died of the excessive draughts which they took of the unrecitified spirits," demonstrating the lack of restraint of the rioters (*The Political*, 440). The rioters were so desperate for alcohol that "Within a few hours after the casks had been turned out numbers on both sides of the streets were seen lying on the ground dead drunk" (*The Political*, 440). The text also includes a description of the liquor in the streets. The magazine recounts that "Such vast numbers of casks of spirits were rolled out of the upper still houses and staved that the kennel ran with spirits" (*The Political*, 440).

Dickens takes these descriptions from the magazine and adds his own dramatic details in order to further his portrayal of the rioters as lower class individuals searching for an escape from the reality of their poverty stricken lives. He describes the liquor in the streets by stating "The gutters of the street, and every crack and fissure in the stones, ran with scorching spirit." He includes the mad desire of the rioters for this liquor through the description that the liquor "being

dammed up by busy hands, overflowed the road and pavement, and formed a great pool, into which the people dropped down dead by dozens” (Dickens, 618). Dickens claims, “They lay in heaps all round this fearful pond, husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, women with children in their arms and babies at their breasts, and drank until they died” (Dickens, 618). The fact that Dickens includes not only men but women and children in the scene intensifies the sense of desperation and suggests Dickens’s intent to implicate an entire class of people as the source of the riots.

The theme of insanity is once again dwelt upon by Dickens as he describes the liquor in the streets. Dickens says of the rioters that, “While some stooped with their lips to the brink and never raised their heads again, others sprang up from their fiery draught, and danced, half in a mad triumph, and half in the agony of suffocation, until they fell, and steeped their corpses in the liquor that had killed them” (Dickens, 618). The image of the rioters dancing “in a mad triumph” before falling dead in the street effectively endows them and the scene with a measure of insanity and again suggests that the rioters are of a lower class that would have struggled with mental illnesses due to the desperate conditions in which they lived (Dickens, 618).

Dickens also seems to have felt that the descriptions of the actions of the military within the contemporary texts were useful to his conveyance of the cause of the riots as something other than religious differences. He uses descriptions of the military within his work to suggest that the lower class as embodied by the mob was rising against the upper class as embodied by private individuals such as the distiller and by the government as represented by members of Parliament and the soldiers in the military.

The contemporary text that is closest to Dickens's own description of the interaction between the rioters and the military is *The Political Magazine*. During the attack upon the distiller's house the magazine relates that the "Northumberland militia" arrived and that upon their arrival "the insurgents" immediately "attacked them" (*The Political*, 440). The military represented the government and thus the rioters immediately attacked the military upon sight. Such a grudge against the government suggests class issues rather than religious ones and Dickens thus included similar descriptions in his novel. Dickens relates the failure of the rioters to be discouraged from violence by the military "precautions" that had been taken. He states that members of the government who had hoped that the rioters would be deterred by the military presence "were cruelly mistaken" in this hope. He explains that:

"in half an hour, or less, as though the setting in of night had been their preconcerted signal, the rioters...rose like a great sea; and that in so many places at once, and with such inconceivable fury, that those who had the direction of the troops knew not, at first, where to turn or what to do." (Dickens, 606)

Such disregard for military force and governmental law suggests that the riots stemmed from class issues rather than from a desire to convince the government to remain strict regarding laws against Catholics.

Dickens borrowed the name of one of the rioters described within *The Political Magazine* for use within *Barnaby Rudge*. He includes within his novel the character of Edward Dennis, a hangman, whose arrest and execution is described in *The Political Magazine*. Dickens keeps the profession of a hangman for the Dennis in his novel; however, Dickens gives his Dennis a larger role in the riots than the historical Dennis. The government charged Dickens's Dennis with

“being considered a chief among the insurgents” (Dickens, 663), while the historical Dennis was simply “indicted for assisting in demolishing the house of Mr. Boggis in New Turnstile, Holborn” (*The Political*, 495). Dickens does borrow from the historical account that Dennis demonstrated fear of being hung. The magazine had briefly mentioned that “The prisoner then fell on his knees and implored mercy” (*The Political*, 495), which is akin to Dickens’s image of Dennis “groveling down upon his knees, and actually prostrating himself upon the stone floor” as he begged for mercy (Dickens, 693). However, Dickens exaggerates the extent to which Dennis is fearful of his fate in order to portray Dennis as a laughable and thus memorable figure who was in the ironic situation of being hung when he had himself been in the profession of hanging others and had enjoyed it.

Dickens also chooses to add a hopeful demeanor to Dennis during his initial examination, a countenance not described within the historical accounts of Dennis. The purpose of such an addition is to give Dickens an opportunity to further comment on the government ignoring the problem of poverty which Dickens felt forced individuals to crime. The government instead had men such as Dennis hang “men, women, and children, of every age and variety of criminal constitution” (Dickens, 664). Dickens emphasizes the excess with which the justice system used punishment of hanging through Dennis’s hope that given “the great estimation in which his office was held” it was inevitable “that the national gratitude must relieve him from the consequences of his late proceedings, and would certainly restore him to his old place in the happy social system” (Dickens, 664).

Chapter 6 will conclude the section of this study that analyzes Dickens’s use of the historical documents in conveying his own images of the riots and of Lord George Gordon. The

chapter is particularly useful in understanding how Dickens's use of the contemporary texts and his own additions contributed to his theme of insanity within *Barnaby Rudge*, for the chapter considers in detail the way in which Dickens's portrayed Gordon as a madman. The chapter also serves to demonstrate the way in which Dickens's manipulation of the suggestion found in historical documents that outside forces may have manipulated Gordon strengthens Dickens's own unique argument that social unrest caused the Gordon Riots when combined with Dickens's own fictional addition of the character of Gashford as the manipulative force. Chapter 7 then follows which summarizes the conclusions drawn from the comparison of the descriptions in historical documents of the Gordon Riots and of Lord George Gordon to Dickens's own portrayals within *Barnaby Rudge* which he created by combining aspects of those historical accounts with his own artistry.

## CHAPTER 6: LORD GORDON: DICKENS'S FOOL AND MADMAN

In closely studying the similarities and differences between Dickens's portrayal of Lord Gordon and the descriptions of Lord Gordon within the historical portrayals of Lord Gordon considered in Chapter 4, it is possible to discern Dickens's own views of the historical character of Lord Gordon and of the extent to which he caused the Gordon Riots. This chapter will analyze the choices Dickens made as a writer to include or omit descriptions of Lord Gordon in the contemporary texts previously examined.

The same aspects of Lord Gordon's character and behavior as examined within Chapter 4 will be discussed, which are the eccentricity of Gordon's character and Dickens's own portrayal of Gordon as a madman, the issue of whether outside forces manipulated Gordon, the degree to which Gordon or others were responsible for the riots, and the degree to which Gordon was remorseful and charitable. The goal of this chapter is to determine which contemporary texts Dickens chose to borrow from when forming his portrayal of Lord George Gordon within his novel. The chapter considers the degree to which these historical accounts aided Dickens in his portrayal of his argument of the manner in which Lord George Gordon contributed to the cause of the riots and to what extent Dickens made additions to Gordon's character and behavior in order to accomplish this goal. Dickens's personal artistic choices regarding the portrayal of Lord Gordon are revealed, as well as how they serve to strengthen his argument that lower class discontent caused the riots and the manner in which they add to his theme of insanity within *Barnaby Rudge*.

Dickens's portrayal of Lord George Gordon within *Barnaby Rudge* states that Gordon is both a "fool and madman" (Dickens, 340). One contemporary text which disagrees with Dickens regarding Gordon's character is the memoir written by Gordon's friend Watson entitled *The Life*



*of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795). Watson described Gordon as being “dressed in a suit of black velvet: his deportment was firm and undaunted” (Watson, 24). Watson’s description suggests a man impeccably dressed and of a calm disposition, while Dickens describes a man completely contrary to this image.

Dickens’s description of Gordon instead portrays Gordon as a laughable figure who rode his horse with “his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole frame jogged and shaken at every motion of his horse’s feet” (Dickens, 351). Dickens claims that in comparison to Gordon “a more grotesque or more ungainly figure can hardly be conceived” (Dickens, 351). Dickens portrays Gordon as awkward in dress and mannerisms. Dickens says Gordon holds a cane rather than a whip which he “always” held “in some uncouth and awkward fashion” and which Dickens explains “contributed in no small degree to the absurdity of his appearance” (Dickens, 351). Dickens even states that he “dressed in an unusual manner,” rather than the gentlemanlike attire Watson described (Dickens, 351). Certainly Dickens does not try to veil his intent to make Gordon a laughable character, far beyond the mere “eccentricity” Watson admits to (Watson, 1). Dickens states that Gordon would have “moved the sternest looker-on to laughter” (Dickens, 351). The anecdotes of Gordon’s life found within *Thomas Holcroft’s A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots* (1780) is also, like Watson’s account, more sympathetic and praising of Lord Gordon than Dickens chooses to be. While Holcroft states that Gordon “possesses a great fun of wit and humor” (Holcroft, 41), Dickens chooses instead to create Gordon as a man who is the joke rather than the jokester.

With the exception of the texts by Watson and Holcroft, Dickens’s portrayal of Gordon as mad is similar to those found in the previously mentioned historical documents which

described Gordon. The contemporary text which possesses the most similar portrayal of Lord Gordon to Dickens's is Romily's letters. Romily states of the riots that, "It is well none of our patriots except that madman Lord George Gordon promote these disturbances" (Romily, 119). Romily thus demonstrates his belief that someone who supports the riots, as he feels Lord Gordon does, must be mad. Romily also furthers the vision of Lord Gordon as a fool and a madman through his testimony that "his speeches were incoherent and ridiculous" (Romily, 130). Dickens seems to echo these sentiments from Romily's letters of Lord Gordon as a "madman" (Romily, 119). Dickens has Lord Gordon mention within *Barnaby Rudge* that they "cough and jeer, and groan in Parliament" at him and that they call him "fool and madman" (Dickens, 340). Dickens even includes within his work Romily's same sentiment that Lord Gordon's language in his speeches was "incoherent and ridiculous" (Romily, 130). Dickens describes the way that Gordon addresses the crowd of his followers as being "of a sufficiently violent and incoherent kind" (Dickens, 405).

*Fanaticism* also portrays Gordon's manner of speaking as ridiculous. The account explained that Gordon "did not behave less strangely and disorderly than usual" when he was in Parliament the day of the petitioners' march upon Parliament (*Fanaticism*, 40). Dickens ensures Gordon's behavior towards others is strange and disorderly. One example of this is when Dickens has Gordon tell the fictional Catholic Mr. Haredale, "I cannot talk to you, sir...we have nothing in common." Dickens points out that Gordon is speaking in "a loud voice" and "waving his hand in a disturbed and agitated manner" (Dickens, 406).

*The Political Magazine* is another contemporary text from which Dickens borrowed in order to create the character of Lord Gordon within *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens emulated the

magazine's tactic of suggesting early on that Gordon was insane. The magazine did this by mentioning that "It is an observation of Machiavel that in any dangerous enterprise it is always proper to make use of as an instrument some person tainted with insanity" (*The Political*, 407). Dickens similarly includes within *Barnaby Rudge* various suggestions that Gordon was a "person tainted with insanity" (*The Political*, 407). Dickens suggests Gordon's insanity by making him a figure of extreme nervousness. Dickens portrays him with "a fevered hand" and the propensity to pace "rapidly up and down the room," thus suggesting a particularly nervous and disturbed individual (Dickens, 340).

Dickens includes other more obvious depictions of Gordon as insane in addition to Gordon's nervousness. Dickens relates that though Gordon claimed that as of "March 1780" the Protestant Association was "forty thousand strong" and "still increasing every day," the number "was supposed by many to be the mere creature of his disordered brain" (Dickens, 348). The choice by Dickens to describe Gordon's brain as "disordered" suggests Dickens's intent to convey the image of Gordon as mad. Dickens not only includes the madman Gordon as a part of the riots, but also adds the fictional character of Barnaby whom he makes both mad and a principle rioter. The insanity of Barnaby and other rioters leads them to happily follow the Protestant Association's cause though they do not understand it. Dickens portrays Lord Gordon as a blind follower of the cause as well. Dickens's choice to portray Gordon as mad is further exemplified through the interaction Dickens creates between Gordon and Barnaby within the novel. When Gordon is told by Barnaby's mother that Barnaby is "not in his right senses" Gordon retorts that "It is a bad sign of the wickedness of these times...that those who cling to the truth and support the right cause are set down as mad." Gordon is shown by Dickens to be

“coloring deeply” as he states this, as though such claims of madness directed at himself were common (Dickens, 444). Gordon’s defensive response suggests that Gordon suspects himself of being mad. Also, Barnaby’s willingness to follow the association’s cause suggests that all who are willing to follow it, including Lord Gordon, are mad as well.

Gordon is unable to recognize madness in Barnaby, thus suggesting his own madness. He asks his secretary that Barnaby, ““has surely no appearance...of being deranged?”” (Dickens, 444). When Gordon sees Barnaby’s resolve to remain at his post despite the probability of the military arresting him, Gordon rashly states “This a madman! You have said well, very well. I am proud to be the leader of such men as you” (Dickens, 521). Dickens thus once again shows Gordon’s inability to recognize madness in Barnaby and himself. Gordon does not only find it impossible to recognize madness, he is also instinctively sympathetic towards madness. He states that “we must not construe any trifling peculiarity into madness” and concludes, “Which of us...would be safe, if that were made the law!” (Dickens, 444). Dickens has Gordon turn “red again” upon stating this, as though he is aware that he is mad or at least behaves sufficiently mad to create rumors of his madness amongst the populace (Dickens, 444).

Dickens chooses to suggest within his work that Gordon is controlled by the fictional secretary Gashford. Dickens thus most likely believed that outside forces manipulated the historical Gordon. Such manipulation mostly likely seemed plausible to Dickens given his view of Gordon as a fool and madman. Dickens chooses to differ slightly from the contemporary texts that believed foreign enemies manipulated Gordon. *The Political Magazine* states:

“Whatever were his lordship’s designs certain it is that the agents and spies of our foreign enemies the numerous confederates of the American Congress and the secret enemies of

government and of our happy constitution all rose up as one man and under the colors of his mob committed all that rapine and havoc which threatened to reduce this flourishing metropolis to a head of ruins and which for several days gave it the true aspect of a city taken by storm.” (*The Political*, 408)

Dickens, however, does not agree with *The Political Magazine* that foreign enemies manipulated Gordon. Dickens replaces the foreign enemies with the character of Gashford. Gashford lacks political ties to foreign powers. Dickens makes Gashford of a social standing that would have made him sympathetic to the frustrations of the lower classes. Mr. Haredale refers to Gashford’s lower class background by stating that Gashford had “whined at kitchen windows for the broken food, and begged for halfpence” (Dickens, 406). Dickens thus ensures that the manipulation of Gordon within his novel is about class issues rather than foreign politics.

Dickens makes it clear within his work from the very first introduction of Gordon that Gordon relies upon Gashford to make all of his decisions. Dickens makes it clear that Gashford makes all of the decisions. He has Gordon ask Gashford whether or not to stay the night at the Maypole. Gordon inquires, “What say you, Gashford? Shall we tarry at this house he speaks of, or press forward?” and then states to Gashford, “You shall decide” (Dickens, 334). Gashford is also characterized as secretly pursuing his own agenda, which seems to be an agenda of violence and revolt. Gashford encourages Gordon to think of the Protestant Association as “a glorious cause,” a “mighty cause” and even “a holy cause.” Gordon echoes Gashford like an obedient child, stating that indeed “It *is* a holy cause” (Dickens, 333). The description Dickens provides of Gashford’s character furthers Dickens’s suggestion that Gashford manipulates Gordon. Dickens speaks of Gashford’s “manner” as “sly and slinking” and he describes how Gashford put on a

“meek and deferential manner” and “smiled as if for practice” when in the same room as Gordon (Dickens, 336).

Dickens includes suggestions in his novel of the possible truth of the claim of *The Political Magazine* that Gordon’s “daring seditious speeches of his in parliament which astonished every rational auditor were not the effusions of his own mind but were infused into him by his political and diabolical prompters” (*The Political*, 408). Dickens’s Gordon questions his speeches to the Protestant Association. Gordon questions the influence of one of his speeches on the members of the Protestant Association, asking Gashford “Did I move them, Gashford?” (Dickens, 338). Dickens designed Gashford’s response to suggest inflammatory language to Gordon. Gashford assures Gordon that Gordon had “bade them take heed that they were prepared to follow one who would lead them on, though to the very death.” Gashford also claims that Gordon stated, “Down with the Papists – Vengeance on their heads.” Dickens has Gordon question if he said what Gashford claims he said in order to suggest Gashford was manipulating Gordon’s language. Gashford also claims that Gordon stated that he would lead the Protestant Association “though to the very death” (Dickens, 339). Dickens thus removes some of the blame of causing the riot from Gordon by suggesting that Gashford was the real mastermind behind the degree of zeal surrounding the riot.

Gashford also uses extreme flattery to manipulate Gordon. Gashford claims that upon hearing Gordon speak he “felt what greatness was indeed, and thought, ‘When was there ever power like this of Lord George Gordon’s!’” (Dickens, 339). The flattery works well, for Gordon obediently replies, “It’s a great power. You’re right. It is a great power!” (Dickens, 339). Gordon’s reply also furthers Dickens’s characterization of Gordon as mad. Gordon’s childlike

repetition of Gashford's words with such immediate obedience is suggestive of a developmentally stunted mind. Dickens's portrayal of Gordon as mad establishes Gordon as convincingly unaware of the true consequences of his actions. Dickens uses the example of Barnaby to further establish that insanity does not allow for Gordon to understand consequences. Barnaby, who everyone considered mad, is unable to fully comprehend that the consequence of being captured by the military is to be subsequently put to death. When he is warned by John Grueby that the military will capture him, he rashly replies, "Let them come! Gordon for ever! Let them come!" (Dickens, 521).

Dickens has carefully characterized Gordon as a madman who "had been goaded and urged on by so many for their own purposes" (Dickens 663). Dickens's portrayal of Gordon does not blame Gordon entirely for the riots. Dickens suggests that Gashford manipulated Gordon into carrying out much of the Protestant Association proceedings that led to an environment conducive to rioting. Dickens even places blame on Gashford as the manipulator of Gordon by choosing to have Gashford commit suicide by taking "poison" (Dickens, 733). This suggests Gashford possessed a guilty conscience for the consequences of the riots caused by his manipulation of Gordon and rioters such as Hugh, Dennis, and Barnaby.

In addition to blaming Gashford, Dickens also partly blames the rioters. Dickens characterizes the rioters as individuals who used the excuse of a religious cause as a means of revolting simply for the sake of revolting. To carry out this portrayal Dickens does not provide the rioters with any religious ideologies to drive their rebellion. Dickens references the lack of religious zeal of the rioters. He reveals that the rioters did not know any religious hymns. He states that "Many of those who were banded together to support the religion of their country,

even unto death, had never heard a hymn or psalm in all their lives” (Dickens, 447). The rioters portrayed by Dickens are not sincerely protecting the Protestant religion, but are rather using the religious conflict as an excuse to riot. Dickens later places further blame on the rioters when Gordon is found not guilty during his first trial. Dickens states that “so many people were there, still, to whom those riots taught no lesson of reproof or moderation, that a public subscription was set on foot in Scotland to defray the cost of his defense” (Dickens, 732). Thus Dickens emphasizes the tendency of the populace to rashly gather in large numbers and the failure of the populace to cease such behavior after the disastrous consequences of the Gordon Riots. Dickens again holds the rioters partly responsible when describing that Gordon blames himself “for every act that had been done by every man among the cruel crowd.” Gordon is blaming himself, however, Dickens is pointing out that the rioters carried out violence and thus can not escape blame (Dickens, 661). Dickens’s choice to include the verdict of “Not Guilty” at Gordon’s first trial also demonstrates his desire to deflect some blame away from Gordon. The verdict is found in *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795) which states that “The Jury...returned with a verdict – NOT GUILTY” (Watson, 24). Dickens recounts that the verdict was called because “there was no proof” that Gordon had “called the multitude together with any traitorous or unlawful intentions” (Dickens, 732). Romily’s letters stated this information. He stated that the authorities had been unable to find any “evidence of” Gordon “having planned any revolution” (Romily, 130). Dickens’s portrayal of Lord Gordon as a fool, a madman, and Gashford’s pawn demonstrates that Dickens agreed with the contemporary text *Thomas Holcroft’s A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots* (1780). Holcroft claimed that Gordon “had no idea of producing the dreadful consequences that



ensued from assembling the association” (Holcroft, 41). Dickens provides the same characterization of Gordon within *Barnaby Rudge*.

Dickens borrows from *The Political Magazine* Gordon’s remorse for the violent consequences of his leadership of the Protestant Association and his encouragement of the petitioners to join him in submitting the petition to Parliament. He states that while sitting in his cell in the Tower, Gordon was “remorseful for every act that had been done by every man among the cruel crowd; feeling for the time their guilt his own, and their lives put in peril by himself; and finding, amidst such reflections, little comfort in fanaticism, or in his fancied call” (Dickens, 661). Gordon’s remorse is shown in *The Political Magazine* through Gordon’s recorded statement that he ““had not foreseen these effects in all the degree to which they had extended did not mean them and was sorry for them”” (*The Political*, 444).

In addition to remorse, Dickens provides Gordon with a charitable nature. He most likely followed Watson’s example found in *The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (1795) when stating that Gordon provided for the other prisoners while imprisoned. Watson states that “No man was more beloved by his fellow prisoners than Lord George” for he “clothed the naked, and fed the hungry” (Watson, 107 and 110). Dickens simply states of Gordon that “The prisoners bemoaned his loss, and missed him; for though his means were not large, his charity was great” (Dickens, 733).

Dickens adopted the kinder historical depictions of Gordon, labeling him a manipulated fool rather than a instigator of rebellion. However, Dickens still places a degree of blame on Gordon. He agrees with the statement of *The Political Magazine* that Gordon was

“principally instrumental in convening the rioters multitude which had for six several days and nights infested the streets of the metropolis and that he had been by his speeches &c abetting in producing the great and irreparable mischief to his majesty’s loyal and faithful subjects which had subsequently arisen.” (Political, 444)

Dickens does not ignore the fact that Gordon provided an opportunity for the unhappy lower class to gather in large numbers riot to vent their social grievances.

## CHAPTER 7: POVERTY BREEDS REBELLION

The contemporary accounts of newspapers, political magazines, diaries, and letters differ in their opinions regarding the cause of the riots, some of the details of the actual proceedings of the riots, and Lord George Gordon's role in the riot. Dickens most likely observed these differences while researching for his historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* and he seems to have chosen to use and omit various historical details from these contemporary texts as a means of conveying his own political opinion regarding the cause of the riots. Upon having closely considered the contemporary accounts of the riots and Dickens's choice of details from these texts, we have been able to determine that Dickens's political opinion regarding the Gordon Riots. Dickens believed that social unrest closely connected to class differences caused the riots, rather than religious intolerance of the Protestants towards the Catholics in England. It has also become clear that Dickens felt that the riots were for the most part an unplanned series of destructive acts carried out by the lower class individuals in London. These impoverished citizens resented their positions in society. They cared little about religious issues but recognized the carrying of the petition to Parliament as an opportune time to vent their grievances upon the upper classes and government. Dickens's view of Lord George Gordon seems to have been that he was a foolish man who did not realize the extent of the danger in which he was placing the citizens of London by encouraging such a large group of individuals to march upon Parliament. Dickens believed that Gordon had not intended for violent riots to ensue. Dickens, as we have seen, portrays outside forces manipulating Gordon into creating an atmosphere in London through Protestant Association meetings and inflammatory handbills which encouraged a riot.

Dickens's decisions to use and omit various details from the historical accounts of the Gordon Riots are beneficial through the clues that they provide regarding his personal political

opinion regarding the riots. They are also a testimony to his skill as a writer and specifically as a historical novelist. One of the most intriguing elements of *Barnaby Rudge* is the manner in which Dickens was able to combine the historical and political commentary on the Gordon Riots with the theme of insanity in order to strengthen the sense of the degree to which the extreme poverty and dissatisfaction of London's lower classes had driven those individuals towards the desperate actions carried out during the riots. Dickens's choice to add the rumor, not found within historical documents, that the rioters planned to "throw the gates of Bedlam open, and let all the madmen loose" demonstrates the extent to which Dickens desires to strengthen his theme of insanity in order to accomplish these goals as a writer. Dickens claims this rumor was so much more horrible in the minds of citizens than "national bankruptcy and general ruin" of England from a possible attack on London's bank that it "drove many sane men nearly mad themselves" (Dickens, 604-05). Dickens succeeds in characterizing the rioters as insane by suggesting the rioters had considered such an action and were thus perhaps empathetic towards the madmen who are kept in Bedlam. Dickens is possibly also commenting upon the lack of pity in upper class citizens of London for those less fortunate than themselves. Dickens suggests that they fear what they do not understand. This is evident in his claim that Londoners would be more horrified by the possibility of encountering individuals of disturbed minds than by ruin of the nation. Dickens does not agree with such fear of the lower classes and those amongst them who may have been driven mad. Dickens portrays the ridiculousness of such a fear through his emphasis on the fact that the citizens choose to fear the rumor of the release of Bedlam's insane more so than the possible attack on England's bank which would have the obviously more dire consequence of national ruin.

Dickens's characterization of Lord Gordon himself, a member of the privileged class of London, as a madman who was just as insane if not more so than the rioters themselves is also an important aspect of Dickens's theme of insanity. It demonstrates Dickens's belief that the upper classes of London were in part responsible for the desperate actions of those lower classes. The responsibility of those upper class individuals lays in their ignorance regarding the contemporary social situation and the extent to which social reform was necessary. Dickens describes a group of rioters who continued rioting because they possessed "the sense of having gone too far to be forgiven" (Dickens, 483). Dickens also suggests the motivation of class grievances behind the rioting by explaining that "They all hoped and believed, a greater or less degree, that the government they seemed to have paralyzed, would, in its terror, come to terms with them in the end, and suffer them to make their own conditions" (Dickens, 483). Finally, Dickens explicitly states his opinion regarding the motivations of the rioters when he includes in his novel that the rioters "were stimulated by their own headlong passions, by poverty, by ignorance, by the love of mischief, and the hope of plunder," all reasons which stem back to class issues (Dickens, 483-84).

The extent to which it is helpful to carry out such a detailed comparison of contemporary accounts of the Gordon Riots and of Dickens's own fictional account of the riots has hopefully been conveyed through this study. The benefits of such a study can be seen in the conclusions it has allowed possible regarding Dickens's political view of the cause of the riots and of Lord Gordon himself, as well as the additional proof it has provided of Dickens's skill as a writer. Without studying closely the historical documents, one is unable to fully appreciate the detailed manner in which Dickens studied and utilized those documents. He meticulously chose to use or

omit various details in order to create the image of the riots that he desired and the image of Lord Gordon which he felt would best convey his belief class differences rather than by religious intolerance caused the riots. The intricacies of the theme of insanity also become apparent through this detailed study. The study reveals the extent to which Dickens intensified the mention of madness when describing the rioters and Lord Gordon. It concludes that Dickens chose to do this in order to comment upon the dissatisfaction and violence of the lower classes in London brought on by poverty and the ignorance, or disregard, of such social issues by members of Parliament and upper class individuals such as Lord Gordon. This study should encourage other close comparisons of historical documents to the historical novels which followed in order to better understand the intent of the authors who chose to take on the task of describing a historical event through the medium of fiction.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackroyd, Peter. Dickens. New York: HarperCollins, 1990.
- Butt, John and Kathleen Tillotson. Dickens at Work. London: Methuen, 1957.
- Craig, David. "The Crowd in Dickens." The Changing World of Charles Dickens. Ed. Robert Giddings. London: Vision, 1983.
- Dickens, Charles. Barnaby Rudge. Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1973.
- Fanaticism and Treason: or, a Dispassionate History of the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Rebellious Insurrections in June 1780. By a Real Friend to Religion and to Britain. London, 1780.
- Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser. 10 June 1780.
- General Evening Post. 10 June 1780.
- Gold, Joseph. Charles Dickens: Radical Moralizer. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1972.
- Holcroft, Thomas. Thomas Holcroft's A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots, London, 1780. Ed. Garland Garvey Smith. Atlanta, 1944.
- Johnson, Edgar. Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph. 2 vols. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952.
- Joyce, Simon. "Resisting Arrest/Arresting Resistance: Crime Fiction, Cultural Studies, and the 'Turn to History.'" Criticism: a quarterly for literature and the arts. 37:2 (1995): 309.
- London Courant and Westminster Chronicle. 6 June 1780.
- McDonagh, Patrick. "*Barnaby Rudge*, 'Idiocy' and Paternalism: Assisting the 'Poor Idiot.'" Disability & Society. 21.5 (2006): 411-23.
- Rice, Thomas J. "The Politics of *Barnaby Rudge*." The Changing World of Charles Dickens. Ed. Robert Giddings. London: Vision, 1983.

- Robson, Catherine. "Historicizing Dickens." Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies. Ed. John Bowen and Robert L. Patten. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Romilly, Samuel, Sir. Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself; with a Selection from His Correspondence; Edited by His Sons. 3 vol. London, 1840.
- Smiley, Jane. Charles Dickens. New York: Lipper/Viking, 2002.
- Smith, Grahame. Charles Dickens: A Literary Life. New York: St. Martin's P, 1996.
- Smith, Grahame. Dickens, Money, and Society. Berkeley: U of CA P, 1968.
- The Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal. (June and July 1780) London, 1780-1781.
- Watson, Robert, M.D., F.R.S. The Life of Lord George Gordon, with a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct. London, 1795.
- Willis, Mark. "Charles Dickens and Fictions of the Crowd". Dickens Quarterly: a Scholarly Journal Devoted to the Study of the Life, Times, & Works of Charles Dickens. 23:2 (Jun 2006): 85-107, 144.
- Wilson, Angus. The World of Charles Dickens. New York: Viking, 1970.



